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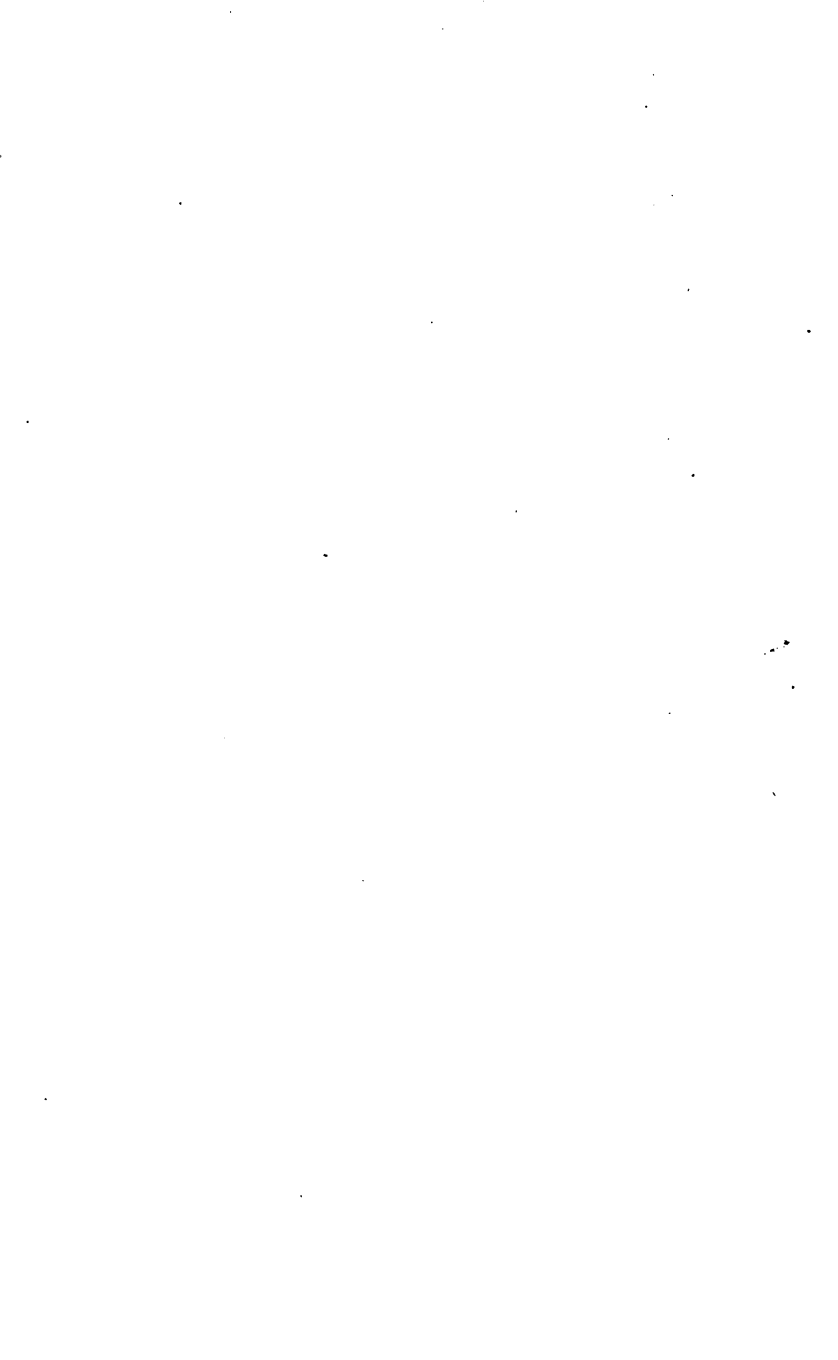








WARREN KNOWLES



WARREN KNOWLES

A NOVEL

BY

ALAN JAMES GULSTON

IN THREE VOLUMES

'DEEDS SHOW'

VOL. I

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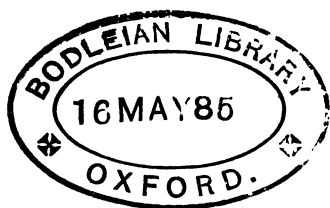
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WARREN KNOWLES



CHAPTER I

THE frost had hardened ; and as the evening began to shut out the day, the night-clouds lowered grey over the sky. While all others had settled down in their homes, or sought the welcome shelter of an inn, one lonely traveller still held on his way. Tall and in the vigour of manhood, he walked on. With quick and active steps he strode up Forest Hill, so called because the road there passed out from the cultivated

land into the wild woods. This old oak forest, where roamed herds of deer, formed part of the large estates of a certain Squire Knowles, whom no one thereabouts had seen during many years, and who was believed to be travelling in foreign parts or dwelling in some remote corner of England. Having overcome the steepness of the hill, the traveller paused not until, when some short distance within the woodlands, he came to where five roads met, and where, at this junction, stood—and, let us hope, does still stand—an old monolith. This stone had originally been put up by Druids, or perhaps even by some earlier worshippers; then some Christians had on it incised the semblance of a fish, the first recognised emblem of their faith; while later some devotee had carved the sign of the cross—but all of which, for the moment, were half-hidden by the large paper placard of some wandering mountebank show or circus. To this monolith the traveller drew nigh; and having wrapt around him a large maud, he threw himself on the supporting step, and exclaimed,

‘At length on our own land! Thanks be to God for all his goodness!’

There he lay, silent and motionless, somewhat tired, but still equal to any exertion. Half-asleep and half-awake, his thoughts reverted to his younger life—to the days when he wandered far and near through this forest and neighbourhood. There he lay listening, so to say, to the silence, and sometimes to the bark of a distant farm-dog. Time passed, and still there he lay. At last on his ear there suddenly fell a new, though faint, sound. Raising his head, and resting on his hand, he listened. At first the sound rose and fell, sometimes consecutive and sometimes unheard; then by degrees it became more and more distinct, until he discerned the steady and regular footfall of a horse in full gallop. Nearer and nearer came the animal—and well the traveller knew that the way it approached was the straight road from Knowle Manor—the mansion where his own early days had been passed, but which now, and for some long time, had been let to one John Beal, a successful merchant and speculator. The good horse bore its rider along at a quick pace, and soon reached the monolith, when, becoming suddenly aware that there was something unusual at the base, it

swerved across the road. Its rider sat it firmly ; but having pressed rather heavily on the stirrup, the stirrup-leather gave way, and fell down on to the road. The rider had much difficulty in bringing his horse to a standstill, and even then seemed unwilling to dismount, whereupon the traveller rose, hurried forward, and picked up the fallen stirrup.

‘ Ah ! that is right, my man,’ said the horseman ; ‘ just see if you can do anything with it.’

The traveller, after a short delay, managed to fasten the stirrup-leather again to the saddle.

‘ You seem, my man, to be a traveller on this road. Have you seen or heard anything of a young lady who has met with an accident ?’

‘ No,’ answered the other, ‘ I have not ; out should be happy to be of use if you can tell me how.’

‘ My niece and I, my man, live at Knowle Manor ; my name is John Beal ; my niece is missing. Her horse has come home without her ; neither I nor any of my own people can make out what has become of her.’

‘ Has the horse been long home ?’

‘It returned not a quarter-of-an-hour now past.’

‘Then,’ said the stranger, ‘I will lose no time before trying to find her; but tell me by which road did the horse come back?’

‘By this very road. So, quick! do your best; report to me at the Manor, and I will reward you for your trouble.’

Then, putting spurs to his horse, Mr Beal was soon out of sight. Hilton (the traveller, now known by this assumed name) remained during a few seconds in meditation. He clearly knew that the horse could not have passed the monolith within even a much longer time than a quarter-of-an-hour; nor could it have been along the road by the which he had come. So walking off at a brisk pace down towards Knowle Manor, he marked every track, and this the more easily as few had been that way. The moon, which had now risen, also helped him with her pale light. Thus observing everything, he proceeded for some time, until at length he could distinguish the hoof marks of a horse which he had not before perceived. Having halted for a moment in order to examine more closely this track, he next tried to trace it backward along the road by the

which he had as yet advanced. This he did slowly and with difficulty. After a few yards, he came to where a horse had stumbled and stamped the spot with a deep indentation. Again stopping, he looked carefully on all around, and soon could plainly discern that a horse had here forced its way through the underwood, and thus the track left the road. Following the several marks—sometimes the slot, sometimes a small broken branch or a stone lately rolled from its place—he soon came to a green glade which the frost had only slightly hardened, and where he could clearly trace the impressions of a horse's feet. These he easily tracked. Recalling to mind his earlier recollections of the forest, every bit of which he so well knew, he at once came to the conclusion that this was the green glade which continued open for about a quarter-of-a-mile, and then passed out by a deep glen on to the bare heathland, well-known as the frequent haunt of poachers, tramps, and even worse characters. Startled at the idea, that any woman of gentle blood, or delicate feelings, should have, perhaps, fallen amongst such people, he dashed into a run, and hurried, at his speediest, on to the open

heath. Scarcely had he cleared the trees, and the wild land spread before him, when a loud scream reached his ears. Near, it must have been; guided, therefore, by the sound, and remembering that immediately in front of him were old gravel-pits, into these he sped; and even as he entered, he came upon a group, consisting of two women and a man, who were struggling with another woman. He instinctively felt that this fourth person must needs be Mr Beal's niece. Shouting, 'Run! run! run for your lives!' he, with his walking-stick, knocked down the man, and before he could deal another blow, the two women had taken to their heels, and the man having sprung up, was also soon out of sight. As he raised the lady from the ground, he said,

'Are you hurt?'

'I am not,' she answered. 'Thank God that you are here!'

'Then come,' he hurriedly said; 'we must get away from this place, and at once; for although three have fled, there may be many more lurking about,' and, offering her his arm, they walked quickly back off the heath—she still frightened

and agitated, and he guiding her through the forest by ways and intricate passes, such as only some one very well acquainted with the place could have hit on. Upon reaching a small trickling stream, he besought her to sit down, to drink sparingly of the water, and also to bathe her hands and forehead.

‘A little rest will do you good,’ he said; ‘and I believe that any rascal would hardly dare to follow us here, where at any moment he might stumble on a gamekeeper.’

‘You are most kind, sir,’ she answered; but whom have I to thank for all this timely help?’

‘My name? Oh, never mind this once; only let me see you safe. I think we had better walk on, as the night is cold, and you might suffer if you allowed this hard frost to chill you. You had much better again accept my support.’

To take his arm again, she was obliged. Not only was she still weak, but the road was uneven; and, moreover, both were not quite assured that some ruffians might not even now follow. ‘Time and the hour’ bring all things to an end; and thus, at last, once again they stood on the hard road in

front of Knowle Manor. Loosing his arm, she said,

‘I am sure that my uncle would wish to see you, and to know to whom I am so greatly indebted. He and I would—both of us—wish to know more of you.’

‘I am sorry to refuse, but you must excuse me. I have travelled far, am weary, and not fit for a drawing-room.’

‘But you must be one of our neighbours,’ replied she. ‘No stranger could know the forest as you know it—even the stepping-stones through quagmires, and at night. Pray, sir, come in that I may at least thank my deliverer in my own home.’

‘Pray, excuse me. I now see you safe, and therefore bid you Good-night.’

‘And,’ continued she, ‘not even know the origin of my misfortunes?’

‘Allow me to assure you that it would give me much pleasure to receive thanks from your uncle and from you, but it is impossible; and now that we are at the entrance-door’——

‘Nay!’ said she, interrupting him, ‘can I not offer you anything in return for so much kindness?’

‘Yes,’ exclaimed he, quickly, feeling in full

the romance of the situation, and also perceiving how tall and graceful was his companion. 'Yes; give me your glove, for I perceive you have lost the other. You will not miss it.'

Whether impelled by gratitude, or the deep feeling in his voice, she replied,

'Yes—there—take it—but it is such a trifle, and scarcely a token of my gratitude. Now, you must enter.'

And even then she made the hall-bell ring.

But at the sound, Hilton started, and, ere she was aware, raised her hand, and having slightly pressed it to his lips, he passed into the shrubbery and disappeared even as a ghost might have vanished.

While she hesitated in her impulse to call after him, the hall-door was opened, domestics and lights appeared, the spell of romance was gone. She merely said,

'Is my uncle at home?' A few minutes afterwards she was in his presence, when thanks for her safety, and inquiries into the cause of her absence, and the return of her horse without her—were poured forth by those who welcomed her.

CHAPTER II

HILTON? and who was Hilton? His real name was Knowles, or, rather, Warren Knowles, son and heir to James Knowles, the present owner of Knowle Manor. This James Knowles had, on completing his twenty-first year, become the master of Knowle Manor, a most magnificent estate. The mansion was old; an Elizabethan red brick and stone house, and stood on a knoll (hence, in all probability, the name of both house and family.) In front of it there stretched for miles its rich farm-lands, intersected here and there by copse and tall woods; while the river

Avon meandered through the green and luxuriant meadows. On each side of the mansion, and far to its rear, spread out the splendid forest, filled with primeval oak trees, beneath which Britons had strayed long ere Rome invaded their haunts. Delightful glades opened on all sides, and pastured hundreds of fallow and red deer; while the timid roes almost forgot their fears, so quiet and secure was their refuge. About a mile distant, on the right began the wild heather-lands, which, gradually rising, at length terminated in the far distant hills. Such was Knowle Manor; here had Warren Knowles first seen light, and here all the most pleasant days of his childhood and youth had been passed; here also had he learned all sorts of woodcraft, and all the sports of the field; here he had strengthened himself by divers means of exercise; all the which, when he became a wanderer, in after life, had well-served him. Few mortgages were on the estate when his father, James Knowles, became the possessor. While his children grew up, he and his wife lived on in full enjoyment of life; but without either increasing or diminishing the original charges on the

lands. When his son grew to manhood he exerted himself, and drew on his resources to the utmost, in order to improve his already good position; but, alas! his experiences were not such as to teach him the knack and cunning requisite to make and invest monies. He raised monies on mortgage, and thus unwisely tried to push on his fortune; but success did not attend them; the monies went, but returned not; the investments were not prudent, and ere many years, Squire Knowles began (in his old age, for the first time) to feel the need and want of money. Some years passed, and then on one well-remembered morning, he had received a coldly polite note from his banker, regretting that Mrs Knowles had already overdrawn his credit beyond the usual limit, and stating that, for the present, his drafts could not be cashed. For one long day the Squire and his wife had sorrowfully pondered over this. The next day saw them off to town, in order to have the best advice which a London lawyer's experience could give. Long were the consultations, and serious were the measures proposed. A rumour passed through the neighbourhood, that the Manor would be

sold ; but year after year went by, and still the estate remained unbought. All was doubt in the neighbourhood, until curiosity gradually died out, chiefly from lack of food on which to subsist. One thing was, however, undoubted—the Squire and his wife had never returned to their home. Servants were dismissed by the local family lawyer, he collected the rents and paid the necessary estate expenses. After a few years of solitude, the house and estate were let to Mr Beal ; and in the course of time he became almost the recognised owner. The last news which had reached the neighbourhood was to the effect that Warren Knowles (the young Squire, as he had been called) had sold out of the Grenadier Guards ; but where he had gone or what he had afterwards done, never gratified the ear of idle curiosity. Warren Knowles had been an ornament and favourite in the Guards. Tall, handsome, light-hearted, high-born, and with plenty of money, no wonder that he was a success in London society, a member of several first-rate clubs, and moreover the idol of match-making mothers. Alas ! for the vanity of this world. One evening he received a note from his mother, dated at

a fashionable hotel. He dropped several charming engagements, and dined quietly with his parents. Six weeks afterwards he had sold out, and the Guards and London knew him no more.

CHAPTER III

ONE evening, at a small farmhouse in a remote part of England, sat the Squire and his wife. Tea and toast were on the table; she was working with her needle while he read aloud; but when he had suddenly stopped in the attitude of listening, she said, 'It is scarcely time; but as he promised to come, so he is sure to be here, unless some weighty cause intervenes.'

He opened his book and again began to read, when she exclaimed, 'Hush! listen! Yes, there is a horse on the road! he it must be!'

She rose, but ere she had made a step

forward, the door opened, and in came Warren. O! the pleasure in all their hearts! the gratitude to God! What greater pleasure on earth than the meeting of friends in midst of misfortune—the meeting of friends and kindred involved in the same downfall. His repast seemed a banquet; the evening's joys were one ecstasy. When the clock struck twelve, all three wondered at the lateness of the hour. The saying 'Good-night' was a long and delicious delay. Warren retired to his small bedroom and narrow bed; and there he slept, without a turn, for many good hours. The bright sun awoke him. Out of bed he sprang, strong in his youth, and calmly content at knowing that he had done, and was about to do, all that a son could in order to help and cheer his parents in their misfortune.

Breakfast was enlivened by conversation about the dwelling in which they were and all its appliances. Warren, in a quiet way, became more, if possible, resolved to carry out the plans which he had already formed; he saw the advantage it would be to his father and mother; how it would help all their money arrangements, and consequently their comfort and well-doing. So on he

talked, cheerfully but pertinently, on all connected with them; and then having borrowed his father's fishing-rod, he strolled down to the trout-stream. Although he caught fish, still his thoughts and meditations were far away, in fact, all over the world, in order to weigh and judge if the way he hoped to go and the plans of his future life really were the best. Deep consideration during three hours led him to what he had often previously felt—to wit, that it is impossible to form a detailed plan, but, at the same time, it were wise to have a vague outline of the future, then, having taken the first step or steps with caution and care, to wait on circumstances and the 'unknown to come.' In the afternoon, his father and mother strolled down to the meadows; and he and they sat under a broad, spreading oak tree, looked at his basket of trout, and spoke, not sadly, of the days gone by. After a pause of some duration, Warren said, rather abruptly, yet softly, 'Father, I have sold out of the Guards.'

'Sold out of the Guards!—but I believe it is a wise move after all.'

'Yes, father, it is; and, mother, I shall

soon go into the world, no longer a world's darling ; but to be taken at my own personal worth, and to sink or swim, according to my own fitness.'

'Always,' continued his mother, 'under the will of God.'

'Under the will of God are all things—this is my intention, and I have thought it over deeply, and without prejudice. Out of all the money that I own in this world, I have invested ten thousand pounds, it now seems a heavy sum ; the other day I thought it a straw. The interest on this will be paid to you. I have made my will in your favour. I have no intention, nor wish to die ; but no one knows what a day may bring forth. The interest on ten thousand pounds will help you much. Meanwhile, I have kept back for myself what will serve my turn ; and if the necessity should come on me, I can always apply to you. To-morrow, I propose to go ; I shall leave my baggage with you, and be off in light marching order ; of course I shall often write ; but, mother dear, and father, do not be made anxious if sometimes you do not hear from me.'

'God bless you, my boy !' exclaimed the father, while the tears trickled down his

mother's cheek; and again they relapsed into silence. How long this might have continued, no speculation can tell; but suddenly a robin red-breast perched himself on a thorn-bush close by, and cheerily sang his song of thanks. Sometime they listened, and spoke not; and when the red-breast fled, they arose and walked homewards, discussing the future with a quiet trust in God, and looking forward to 'come what might,' with confidence and firm reliance on His kindness. The day wore away into night; night passed on, and so—bedtime. Much had they talked; and when they parted they all felt happy, and more relieved in mind than they had been ever since the first knowledge had come on them, that their wealth was nigh gone, and that poorer days were before them.

They parted that night at bedtime, and long was it ere they again met. Warren, in his own small room, prayed thankfully to God, and then fell into the perfect sleep of health and strength. His father and mother talked long over their son and his future, and even reviewed their own arrangements; and so they also slept in expectation of a tender farewell to their son next morning.

This was not to be. Early, even before sunrise, Warren Knowles arose, packed up a small travelling-bag, stole gently downstairs, patted his mother's pet spaniel as it wagged its tail while stretched sleepily on the rug at the foot of the stairs, and then he passed out. Once he looked back and waved his hand towards those who saw it not. Having reached the high road, he turned his footsteps towards the large neighbouring town. He felt that his struggle in the world had begun. His plans were made; so he walked on cheerfully and without hesitation. He breakfasted at a small but clean inn, and gladly perceived how far even a comparatively small sum will go with one who does not appear to be rich. On he walked through the day. At nightfall he entered the large city. At a public fountain he drank water, and thus refreshed, he sought a bed, cheap but clean. After breakfast next morning, he departed even as he had come.

The men of the Royal Artillery fell into the ranks; their roll-call was gone through; half-an-hour's drill succeeded; then they were dismissed. As the sergeant turned away, he was addressed by a tall young man: 'Sergeant, I am come to enlist.'

The sergeant's experienced eye glanced on him, and his inspection was favourable. 'Yes, young man, I think that you will do; but come along to the orderly-room; we shall there see what you are fit for.'

Thus did Warren Knowles become a gunner in the Royal Artillery. What a change! not six weeks ago, he was an officer of the Guards, rich, and a man of fashion; now a private in the Royal Artillery; but a strong sense of duty and a determination to succeed in life, all founded on the fear of God, cheered him in this work. A natural quickness, improved by education, soon freed him from the preliminary drills; but long ere he was an approved artillery-man, his fellow-soldiers had learned to look on him as one far above the ordinary gunner; his knowledge not only of writing, but of writing correctly; his power of unpuzzling some difficult letters, which had been much beyond the talents of others; moreover his good behaviour, rigid honesty, and manly bearing, all gave him that influence in the battery, which is the stamp of innate superiority. He lived not in the present; all his ideas, all his actions, had reference to the future. His greatest pleasure was to receive a letter from his

father or mother ; his second greatest pleasure, was to write, in answer, a pleasant and hopeful account of his life and doings. Gradually this acknowledgment of his superiority increased ; and, in due course, he rose to the grade of sergeant. His influence was not only great, but always exerted for good ; his example and his advice, little by little, brought a higher tone and bearing to most of his fellow-soldiers ; and his power was completed on a fair-day, in an Irish garrison town, when a professional wrestler amused himself with hustling and throwing several soldiers in succession. ‘ Hilton ’ (the name by which Warren Knowles was known) tripped up this professional athlete, and rolled him into a muddy ditch. The wrestler arose in his fury, and rushed at the sergeant, but was again knocked backwards into the same dirty slush. Hilton, henceforward, was not merely the man of good behaviour, but also the man of strength ; and animal strength impresses most thoroughly the common mind. Among the men of his battery, there was one exception ; one man alone held aloof from him. Strange to say, this man was also known as an edu-

cated scholar, one whose English was thoroughly grammatical, and whose accent was correct. Hilton oft-times sought his companionship; but although the answers were kindly given, and his address sometimes even respectful, still this man, this Tom Pickard, never sought Hilton—was never influenced by him as others were. Hilton suggested to his superiors that Gunner Pickard was equal to the duties of a corporal. Pickard was brought to the orderly-room; an examination of his merits and capabilities was made, and he was immediately offered promotion; but he respectfully yet most firmly declined all advancement—he preferred to remain where he was. After this, Hilton showed many a kindness to Pickard, spared him many a distasteful duty, and even frequently visited him in hospital when illness came; but there was still the same answer to all advances: respectful acknowledgment, but no intimacy; kindness of manner when intercourse could not be declined, but all intercourse avoided whenever possible. Thus weeks and months passed on. At last came the time for foreign service, and his battery was ordered to Canada. On the day of embarka-

tion, Sergeant Hilton was in command of a baggage-guard, and among the soldiers of this guard was Tom Pickard. Sergeant Hilton stood watching the ship, which at one time rolled heavily against the pier, and then, as the wave died out, rolled slowly away, only to return once again with a sudden jerk. As once again the ship rolled seaward, a gunner rushed forward and leapt recklessly between the vessel and the shore. Down he went; the vessel rolled towards the land, and all was shut out from sight. The vessel ground against the side of the pier; the spray dashed highly up; while the few who had witnessed the gunner's leap looked on horror-struck. A few seconds, and the vessel parted from the stones; then Sergeant Hilton dropped himself, coolly and collectedly, into the dangerous abyss. It closed again, but on the next opening, the voice of the sergeant was heard; sailors and soldiers became aware of what was going forward, and placed fenders between the ship and the shore; and soon Sergeant Hilton and his burthen were brought up and landed safely on the pier. Then, and not until then, the would-be suicide was seen to be Tom Pickard. When the ship sailed, Tom

Pickard was in the 'sick-bay,' but after about half the passage had been completed, he was occasionally seen on deck, still clothed in the hospital dress. On nearing the coast of America, very cold weather came on; snow frequently fell, and the shrouds and rigging were one mass of ice. It became bitterly cold. The troops landed, and the sick list increased. Amid his duties, and occupied in constant inquiries about Canada, and all the different and many ways of life, and advancement—Hilton, for the time, forgot Tom Pickard; until one afternoon an hospital orderly brought a request from Tom Pickard, that he would at once come. He immediately hastened to the hospital, and soon was by the bedside of the sick gunner. Tom Pickard looked very ill, and worn almost to a skeleton; while, on it being told that Hilton had come, a severe fit of coughing was superinduced. This by degrees subsided; then the gunner turned his head, and gazed steadily at Hilton.

'Yes,' he said, 'you, sir, are Warren Knowles.'

'You know me,' answered Hilton, 'but I cannot in the least recall your features.'

'It matters not. I was, for some years, a

clerk in the office of Messrs Lyall, Synkmore, and Wynn.'

'Our family lawyers! but I do not remember you!'

'Mr Warren Knowles,' continued the sick man, vainly trying to raise himself on his elbow, 'I am a dying man! Nay, listen, for my time is short,'—after a pause he again went on, 'Yes, I am dying; and but for your courage and kindness, should long ere this have passed away. Messrs Lyall & Co. have ruined you and your father! Yes, ruined you deliberately, and of "malice aforethought." Me also have they ruined; simply because I remembered too much, and knew too well their conduct and infamous designs against the Knowles. They dismissed me, and refused to give me any character whatsoever; they managed to keep me out of every employment, and thus forced me to enlist, as my only means of continuing my wretched life; but, there is a God! The very means they took to blot out all I knew, and to prevent me from telling you—these very means have thrown you and me together, have allowed you opportunities for kindness to me, and thus my gratitude to spring up; I now, on my

death-bed, will help to restore to you some of your property. I am dying even now ; I cannot speak any more, but I have written ; and this is all ; yes, all that I knew of business connected with Knowle Manor, and the infamous lies and deception practised by Messrs Lyall, Synkmore, and Wynn. God bless you, Mr Knowles ! Good-bye for ever ! Shake hands with me, sir—thank you ! If ever you overcome and triumph over the iniquities of that respectable firm, then, and not till then, just say that you learnt the trick from Tom Pickard. Please leave me.'

He again coughed ; and handing over a closed packet to Hilton, turned his face to the wall. Hilton said,

'Good-bye, Tom Pickard ; I will never forget this kindness.'

Tom Pickard tried to move, but could not. Hilton observed the faint effort. Bending, therefore, down over the bed, he brought his ear close to Pickard, who, in a gentle whisper, almost inaudible, said,

'Sir, there is my old mother ! tell her that my last word was for her ; help her when I am gone.'

Then came a silence. The nurse held up

her hand so that the sergeant answered not.
Then the nurse let fall her hand and said,
'It is over! he is dead!'

CHAPTER IV

HILTON, *alias* Warren Knowles, seizing his first leisure hour read with much avidity the writings left him by Tom Pickard; and often he regretted that Pickard had not spoken on this subject; there were so many points to ponder on, so much to remember. After his first perusal, he, during some nine or ten days, meditated on all; then rallying his thoughts he again read the document. He rested on each paragraph, almost admired, how easily, how gently, each lure had been thrown out; how, under the form of advice, all wise movements were prevented, and how, when a false step was taken, no warning, no

sign was made. It is easy to do wrong, easier still, to leave what is right undone. Step by step the original undertaking was carried out, that is, to make more ready money a necessity, to show the value of a mortgage, if possible to let the interest not be forthcoming; to smile and kindly say, 'There is no difficulty.' His father, James Knowles, had often wrestled against what seemed to be an evil fate, when it was merely the clever roguery of his family lawyer. Their ulterior object was to make the payment of interest an impossibility, or a seeming impossibility, foreclose on the estate, and sell it. Yes! sell these large estates at half their value, to John Doe, or Richard Roe, or to any other name; and when time had passed, who could, or would care to tell how the respectable and well-known firm of first-class solicitors became the owners of Knowle Manor. James Knowles' sudden resolution to consult with other solicitors, and other friends, had now, for a considerable time, disappointed the quick realisation of this project. All expenses having been reduced, then, for a while, the interests were, for the first time, paid regularly out of income; but Messrs

Lyall, Synkmore, and Wynn well knew that a few bad harvests, or a government fond of change and experiment, might so reduce the rents, that this safe payment of interest would cease; they bided their time, and as James Knowles, Esquire, still had confidence in them, so they knew exactly how all his affairs stood, and how small a margin there was, in order to meet the expenses on the estate, and on which to live. Warren Knowles saw how inevitable was the doom of Knowle Manor; one thing alone could save it, and that was money, but money was not. With time and the help of God, he hoped, nay! he felt the strong likelihood that he would succeed, but what if rents fell? He was saddened with these thoughts, but, gay or sad, he still inquired into all the ways and means by which adventurers, either by steady industry, or by (what they themselves called) a 'turn of luck,' rose from penury to affluence. He mixed with all classes excepting always the perfectly successful; these were so far above him that the poor sergeant could never have an opportunity of hearing from themselves how they had passed up to the 'Mightiness of Wealth.' Still the multitude would talk

and recount the well-known steps by which one had mounted the golden ladder, or again, how another had by one sudden rush shone out in all the glories of newly won grandeur. He often gazed with wonder as he met some of the rich parvenus. Some of the richest (not all) were vulgar, overbearing, wicked, and apparently unscrupulous; and many did not appear to have any peculiar talent or acuteness; one thing, however, was certain, and that was, 'They were rich, and once had been poor.' Meanwhile he went on steadily with his military duties; he studied the several branches of his profession, became thoroughly cognizant of all the knowledge that the Artillery or Engineers could teach. His previous education at good schools, and under scientific tutors had now much helped him, and when some three years had come and gone, he, full of knowledge, and with health and strength, longed to start in the pursuit of that wealth which alone could rescue his father and mother from the hold that lay on them—could alone free them from the greed and wickedness of Messrs Lyall, Synkmore, and Wynn. Often had he listened to the accounts, which he received from wanderers on the American continent,

of wonderful hits they had made, of the miraculous success, with which they had met; but still the fact remained, that these men were still poor, the one great proof was wanting. Of their adventures they were full; hairbreadth escapes from animal and man; slaughters, from which they alone had escaped; shipwrecks, where all, but he who now told the tale, had been drowned. The adventurers were there—in the wealth all listeners seemed to believe, but still they came and they went; some returned no more; a few were reported to have at last met with some dazzling success; some often again appeared at their usual tavern, the same in look, the same in habits, but still just on the brink of winning mighty wealth, which never came. One man there was, the black waiter called him Mister Ball; his associates called him Pistol Ball, and once a travelling loafer called him Brandy Ball, but the loafer then and there learned never again to use that name.

‘Sir! if we were in the United States I would draw my pistol on you; but, as the Queen of England and Canada objects to such an exhibition, I should feel obliged by your permitting me to snuff from your swell

hat that glittering buckle,' and so Pistol Ball, with a snap-shot of his revolver picked off the buckle from the loafer's hat, and as the hat was on the loafer's head, it taught an easily understood lesson. This man Ball, or Pistol Ball, had for many days associated with Warren Knowles—not in the way of intimacy, but as an occasional acquaintance. He told of adventure, of attempts at rising in the world, of gold-diggings, of quick success in farming, and of adventures with Indians; he was decidedly a man of education, and so far as conversation went, showed acuteness and great experience of the world. Occasionally he drank brandy in great quantity, and was believed then to pass a week or more in abject drunkenness. When he again appeared in his usual haunts he looked ill and tremulous, but gradually he would improve in health and strength, until on some morning he was known to have again started on some distant undertaking. Once, after a year's absence, he at last again appeared in his usual haunts, and again sought Hilton with more than his usual heartiness. He talked and he laughed, and recounted adventures; but Knowles soon perceived that Ball's great object was to see

and understand how much he, Hilton, had learnt of his artillery profession. Pistol Ball soon saw that Hilton's pistol-shooting was first-rate; then he questioned about Hilton's knowledge of horses, of encamping out; then he inquired about pontoon bridges and his knowledge of floating pontoons and guiding them in quick and dangerous rivers. In fact, Ball was, for some purpose of his own, putting Hilton through an examination, which the sergeant, with good-nature, but still with a thorough comprehension of what was being done, quietly allowed. Ball soon saw this, and in a smiling way continued the inquiry. One day he said to Hilton,

'You have every requisite but one to go up the country with me and make a good hit—not a common affair, but one that would make us great men for life. Now, I will tell to you one persuading fact: I would do it all by myself, but there are two difficulties which I cannot conquer. Can you help me to overcome them?'

'If not dishonest,' answered Hilton, 'I might try.'

'A cautious answer I always receive as a good answer; and yours is cautious.'

'And your difficulties; what are they?'

‘Well,’ continued Ball, ‘we must have money. It is a trading speculation; and so, for a certainty, money is our first difficulty. Do you think you could help us out of that?’

‘Money is always a difficulty,’ said Hilton, ‘but not an impossibility.’

‘Well said again! So I will pass over this difficulty, with a mere reference to £3000; and now for my second, and greatest difficulty. It is this, (and, bending forward, he whispered into Hilton’s ear) I must, and always do, get drunk, when the longing comes on me.’

He drew back, passed his hand slowly over his eyes, and then, looking Hilton full in the face, said, ‘You have it now! But for this last difficulty, I should long since have been wealthy. I often made heaps of money—heaps!—but always, before I could secure it, there came my evil longing; then, when the fit was over, the money, the wealth was gone! Now I am a pauper; but if you can bring forward £3000 sterling, I will make our wealth a certainty; mind you, with fair luck, a certainty! a certainty! but on one condition. Nay, listen; there is nothing to conceal. There is no doubt as to the suc-

cess, if (and here he paused, and drew a long breath) if you promise on your honour, and swear by all you believe, that you will see me through my evil, my drunken fit; tend me, watch me, nurse me—keep the thief and the ruffian from me. Aye! knock me down and bind me; starve me back into myself; keep the knife from my heart, and the thief's hand from my purse. Promise—swear this—and our—your—wealth is a positive certainty.'

'How?' answered Knowles; 'if, when this fierce drunkenness is on you, and I strive to keep you safe, if, then, you should overcome me, what would happen then?'

'Then,' answered Ball, sadly and softly, 'we are both dead men!'

'But,' continued Knowles, 'it may so happen, that in some struggle—for you are sure to resist—I might hurt, or perhaps even kill you; what then?'

'If you have promised to save me, I shall forgive you such an accident; but you are a stronger and a younger man than I am; and, what is more than all, you are a man of determined sobriety. I will take all risks. I tell you that you would never have been in it but for my accursed drunkenness. I have

studied you, and thoroughly searched you out. If we get the money, and you stand by me, it is a certainty. Say no more ; but if you will, meet me here to-morrow.'

CHAPTER V

THE morrow came, and they met again. Hilton asserted that, in time, he might get the three thousand pounds, but would so place it that it could only be obtained by his signature. He objected to a penny of it being carried on his person.

‘All that,’ said Pistol Ball, ‘might be arranged; only get the three thousand pounds, and solemnly undertake to stand by me when the drunken fit comes on.’

Pistol Ball affirmed that he could not live where civilization and quietness reigned; and so, one afternoon took his farewell of Hilton. Having shaken hands, and both

having promised (bar accident) to meet at that very same spot, on a certain day mentioned, some three months hence, they separated. The sergeant watched his new ally pass down the street; and then waited half-an-hour, until in the fading light, he could just catch a faint sight of Pistol Ball, as he rode over a neighbouring rise; then he turned away, passed on to the barracks, and was soon busy in all the details and duties of a sergeant's life. Next day he wrote to his father, in the which he mentioned, how he intended to leave the artillery, and try to push his fortune on the large continent—how he hoped to join in a legitimate mercantile transaction, and how he, by this same post, had written to his agent to sell out, and transmit to bankers in Canada, £3500; and warning his father that his income would be reduced by the interest lost on this sum. He applied for permission to purchase his discharge, from which several of his officers tried hard to dissuade him; but ere the three months were come and gone the sergeant had laid aside his uniform for the last time; and when the trysting day arrived Hilton met Pistol Ball in the usual garb of an American horseman. Pistol Ball was punctual to a

second, and appeared really to rejoice at the sight of Hilton and his changed costume.

‘All right,’ he exclaimed. ‘One week in the bush will make you look like an old hand. Now, come in, and we will have a good dinner, and a good drink. Nay ; if you will not, then I will also abstain ; but come in ; I have ridden for ten hours and touched nothing.’

They sauntered into Ball’s usual tavern, and during a good dinner, talked over and matured their plans. This was easily done, as Hilton knew little, and was willing to be guided. Pistol Ball knew, but still kept secret the transaction, in which he had persuaded the other to join ; knew all the route and its dangers ; and in inspecting Hilton’s horse recognised it, and recounted its history and labours during a few years past.

‘But it is a good one,’ continued Ball, ‘full of spirit and endurance ; it will do ; and now before we take to our beds, let us have ten minutes of most serious talk. Have you anything further to say about this expedition?’

‘Simply this,’ answered Hilton ; ‘that I shall look strictly to the application of the money, and will not produce it in cash, unless

in the very same bank in which I change a cheque, and not even then, unless the *quid pro quo* is there; or I know it is safely in our power.—Nothing more.'

'Good!' said Ball. 'Now for your solemn promise on your honour, the honour of an Englishman, and for your oath as a christian, that you will stick by me; and that when I am mad, furiously raging, through strong drink, and even trying to bully or to cheat you into joining in the fun, then you will face me like a man; and that by force or cunning, or by any other means, you will restrain me, and save me from myself. Knock me, and kick me, if you must; but save me from myself; and fear not, whatever I may say; remember then, that I am mad! when you have tamed me back to reason and to manhood, I shall weep tears of joy; you will have saved me, and perhaps body and soul for ever. You will scarcely appreciate all the good, the glorious deed you are doing; it may be only for the sake of gain; but you will have saved a man. Nurse me, if afterwards I am ill; and if I die, here are three lines, written on parchment, and wrapped in india rubber, for this very purpose, in order, that if necessary,

you may take the money, the gain, and, if possible, my body, to that address; put it at once into your waist-belt—good! and now for your promise and your oath.'

'Solemnly, then,' answered Hilton, 'I give you my promise, on the honour of an English gentleman, that, during this expedition, I will deal truly with you, and save you from all the effects of your drinking, and from the drunkenness itself, if possible, even by violence, if needful, so far as I am capable. I swear all this, solemnly and truly, on the faith of a christian.'

At the beginning, Pistol Ball attentively listened as Hilton continued, and his deeply-toned and serious voice sounding on the night, appeared much to affect his companion; and, ere the oath was finished, Ball stood bare-headed. At its conclusion he uttered 'Amen,' slowly and silently covered his head, looked steadfastly at Hilton, then turned, and, without a word or sign, strode into the darkness. His footfall soon ceased; and then Hilton, also much affected by the whole scene, strolled gently to his lodgings, prayed feelingly and thankfully, and slept the sleep of peace and well-doing.

As daylight dawned next morning, Hilton

and Pistol Ball rode out into the open country. Each was mounted on a small horse (small according to English ideas), and each led another horse, laden with sundry goods. These goods had been collected and most carefully packed by Hilton during the past six weeks. The moment that his money arrangements had become complete, and his discharge duly certified, he had bent his attention to get and put together the things pronounced by Ball to be absolutely needed, in order to make their joint undertaking successful. The most important part of this, his collection, consisted of four waterproof mattresses, covered, on the outside, with strong canvas, and lined inside with caoutchoux, they packed into a small compass, but capable of becoming inflated with air to a large size ; to these were also fastened loops of cord, so that, on occasion, two or more could be firmly lashed together. These were made according to an exact size and plan laid down by his companion ; there was also a roll of strong but slight rope, and a dozen tins of preserved essence of beef, together with a couple of saucepans ; to these latter goods Pistol Ball had given his attention.

‘As we jog along,’ said Ball, ‘we shall develop our plans; I have settled everything, but you will have to carry them out. When we are near our object, I will tell you the secret of all this; now, the money is your only care. Is everything right and ready to pay coin down when needed?’

‘Yes—all ready. The banker at Middletown has his instructions; and all will be ready when we need it.’

‘Meanwhile,’ added Ball, ‘we must go in for health and strength, for we shall need both.’

After a considerable silence, Ball pointed out to Hilton the lay of the country, the distant hills and undulations.

‘I know not that we shall be in difficulties when we get back so far as this, and I have great thoughts of another road; but no one knows what a minute may bring forth: therefore, look well at everything, and mark every object that you can. A good knowledge of country has often saved a man’s life, and what is often of greater value, “the swag.”’

On they jogged day after day. One day Ball pointed out, as they passed it, a tall pole, and remarked,

‘This is the boundary, and here we leave

Canada for the United States. We shall now find a rougher sort; so, if needed, do not be backward with your pistol. Who knows what may happen if you do not shoot quickly enough—then somebody shoots you. Not only is shooting the fashion here, but sometimes, as in Ireland, a man is shot by mistake: so keep your mouth shut and your eyes open.'

Still on they jogged for many a long week; the usual daily routine was only varied by change of scenery; gradually they passed over high and mountainous districts into the Nevada country, and here Ball pointed out the first stream that ran its waters into the Pacific.

'Mark this change, Hilton, and mark it well; for perhaps our way home may be by the Pacific, and not the Atlantic coast.'

Still each day brought its stated journey. In many of the towns and taverns Ball met acquaintances. One day their road lay along the top of a high ridge, many thousand feet above the sea-level; and their route, having changed from a westerly towards a northerly direction, Ball pointed out the river at their feet, and bade Hilton to heed well that just now below them, on each side of the stream,

were grass flats ; how the water came with an impetuous torrent out of the cañon above ; and how, after about half-a-mile of gentle current, it again dashed into the hills, through another turbulent cañon.

‘ And now,’ added Ball, as they reached the highest point of their road, ‘ look at that high rock in the distance ! there, and there only (remember this well), there only is a waterfall, all the way from here to the Pacific. If we, or you, ever float down through this cañon, heed well these meadows ; they are the only low banks during some hundreds of miles ; and so, when you come to them, remember the falls near that high rock ; it looks a long way, but five hours in the cañon will bring you to them. Again remember, you can land on the right hand bank, and carry your goods and boat down to below the falls ; and above all, if you arrive at a white rock, you must immediately land ; for, beyond that, the waters dash in between high cliffs. If caught in that stream, hope is gone. Now, let us jog on ; but before nightfall I hope to have told you more than half my plans, or rather all, except the final making of our fortunes.’

Touching his good steed gently with the

spur, he hastened on ; and as he and his two horses filled the narrow track, Hilton was content to follow. While he yet had the opportunity, Hilton often turned in the saddle, and again and again made observations on all that Ball had bidden him to remember. He marked the run of the roaring river, the rocks, below which were the flat grass-lands, on each side of the only placid current which he had yet seen. He meditated on Ball's words so as not to forget one point ; and when he looked back, for the last time, at the high rock, below which raged the only waterfall, he already felt himself familiar with the depths of the cañon. During some four hours Ball jogged on, or let his horse walk gently up steep inclines ; he spoke not, and gave little heed to Hilton. Once only he stopped, and pointing down a long narrow gorge, said, ' Mark this gorge also ! It is the only opening in the cañon above those flat meadows ; you can just see the waters as they hurry by in the deep ravine, remember this also, and remember it well ; life may depend on it.'

Still on they went ; once they let their horses graze during an hour : then again they were in their saddles. At last, even as

the sun shone low on the tops of the hills, Ball turned from the beaten track and, followed by Hilton, threaded his way through rock and trees, as if most familiar with the place. After about an hour, they found themselves on the bank of the river. Ball jumped from his saddle and tied both his horses to a tree; Hilton lost no time in following his example. Ball made a sign to his companion that the noise of the waters rendered useless any attempt to speak; but again signing to him to imitate, he quickly unloaded the pack horse; then he and Hilton, each carrying a heavy load, passed along between the high overhanging cliffs. Down the stream for some fifty yards, it was just possible to pass; a stranger would have turned back. They stepped from rock to rock; sometimes these were as much as two yards apart, when Ball would leave his load on the rock, and jump from one slippery boulder to another; then Hilton would throw their loads across and follow. Thus they went on, until a high needlerock, partially detached from the cliff, barred the way. Here Ball once again dropped his burthen, and began to climb, between the detached rock and the cliff; one foot on the cliff, and

one on the rock. Some six feet up he appeared to pass into the cliff; having thus apparently reached some spot of safety, he lay on his breast, and stretching out his arms, beckoned to Hilton to lift up to him their loads. This was a work of much labour, but, bit by bit, it was accomplished. Ball waved to his companion to climb up; and Hilton soon found himself in a cave of enormous dimensions. Ball showed him where all the different articles were to be placed; and having done this twice, he crawled out, followed by the other; being now without burdens and active men, they in a very short time were again in the saddle, and in due time far from the roar and turmoil of the deep cañon.

‘Now, listen to this, for there is not much good in repeating the same thing over and over again. I may be with you, or I may not be; or worse still, I may be, as you know, drunk; but whatever happens, you start from that cave at daybreak, so as to be past the waterfall before night; then go on, and never stop nor land until you have passed a native village. The Indians will kill and plunder you if they can; but if their warriors are off hunting, or on the warpath, or even sleeping, you are safe—one quarter-of-an

hour and you are out of their power. Then on again, without a check, until the cañon has ceased altogether and you see nothing but a sandy plain—there, if you like, land and sleep; do what you please. If I am with you and well, great will be my joy; if I am not, then see that the written memorandum, wrapt in india-rubber and which I have given to you, is safe. If I am drunk and with you, beware lest I drown myself—trust me not. If you get me and our wealth safe out of all our difficulties, you will have done more good than you will be aware of. Now we must turn back by this new track, for I have led you far out of the usual way. Let no one know it—and listen, look well at everyone whom you see at our night's lodging: they are all thieves, or worse. After our success—if we have it—they will not only know all about it, but be ready to rob us or murder us—in fact, do anything to procure money or money's worth: give us drink for nothing—that will be to suit me. You they will try—not now, but on our return—with cards, women's smiles, and the “devil's delights” of all kinds. So, my man, look to yourself: above all things, bear in mind that success, and still above that, great

success predisposes man to indulge in his favourite vice—aye, I have known a strong-minded and otherwise prudent man give himself, when successful, over to awful vice, even while on his lips were heartfelt prayers and thanks to heaven for that very success which depraved him. You, no doubt, have your vice: so, look to yourself and beware. Now for food and sleep.'

Putting spurs to his horse he started at a canter, and he and Hilton were soon under cover for the night.

Having next morning made arrangements to leave their two spare horses at 'Docket's Store' (thus was named this lonely place), they, after a hearty breakfast, again jogged on their way.

For some few miles they followed a waggon track until it entered into a deep gorge. Here Ball suddenly halted, and, half-laughing, half-sadly, exclaimed—

'Thinking of her? Hey?'

Hilton also drew his rein, and answered in the same tone, sadly laughing—

'Yes, too true! I was thinking of her.'

'Well,' continued Ball, 'there is one comfort in dealing with an English gentleman, for such I have long taken you to be

He speaks the truth. I have known others, in answer to that question, stammer and blush, or flatly and falsely deny it. So, what do you think of her?’

‘What do I think of her? I was only thinking of her beauty, æsthetically. Such well cut features! such a transparent, yet dark complexion! such luxuriant black hair! and, then, the Scandinavian blue eye! just showing a touch of a superior race; a plump, but not gross form; small feet, well and prettily shod; her short dress, tucked up on the side, showing well-made ankles (the outcome of good proportions); her simple, modest manners; her hand small and dimpled; and last, but not least, her mouth, a slight pout of lips, blending into a smile.’

‘All too true,’ said Ball, ‘and such being a simple truth. Then on our, or your, return, remember! and let your next sight of “Docket’s Store” recall it to you. Remember, and beware of her! Beware of Kathleen O’Byrne. Many a strong man she has brought to his death, and you are half-way there already.’

‘No,’ answered Hilton, ‘I admired, but am not a victim. I know not what weakness, I at another time might have shown;

but now the welfare of father and mother are at stake, and also interests most dear to me. Your very weakness will also help me through many a temptation and danger.'

'So you have a father and a mother ! I am thankful for having heard it ; it will help us, at our worst pinch ; but, Hilton, listen to this, and apply it to your soul. I should not be here, if I did not expect success ; understand, this is by no means the first time that I have sought this wilderness, nor the first time that I have sought exactly the same wealth which I now expect to obtain. By the powers of darkness, it makes my very hairs to bristle when I think how on my first trip all went well, and how it all failed through my own drunkenness, and some despicable folly of my companion. When I awoke out of my excess, my memory would not come back. I could well remember all our business transactions and our success ; I well remembered our joy and our feast ; how we all caroused and rejoiced mightily, and then, a blank ! I rose up, not a penny in my pouch—in fact, I had nothing, but my clothes ; even the place in which I lay was a remote small hay loft ; my bed, some sack-ing stretched over mouldy hay. What aches

and pains all over me. I tottered down into that very room, where this morning we breakfasted, there I begged for a glass of water, and was turned out into the rain to die. I crawled away towards the spring, my thirst was great, and yet half-way I stopped, my feebleness overcame me, my brain reeled, when a childish voice said, "What ails the man?" I looked up; before me stood the prettiest child that, I think, I have ever seen; a child still, and yet just passing into womanhood. On her head was a tall pitcher; I knew at once that she was returning from the spring. Hope revived within me, and I moaned out, "May heaven bless you!" I held out my hand towards her, expecting to receive the pitcher, and take a draught, delicious to my fevered lips. "Nay," said the child, more in answer to my action than in reply to words; "nay, water to you is worth money, so pay, money down, or you get no water from me!" "I have no money," groaned I. "Then you get no water from me." "Child! Child!" continued I, "give me water, or I die!" "O! die, by all means! I daresay your companion will be glad to meet you! and so you will have lived and died together." She

turned to go, and almost sang out a childish, merry laugh. "Can you not, for mercy's sake, give me water ere I die?" "Nay," answered she; "you pay, and the water is yours. Just look—what sparkling, clear water it is!" and she, with the charming grace of childhood, poured some water on to the ground. "How much for a full draught?" exclaimed I, my strength and intellect returning at the sound of the gurgling jug. It was like a rally near the end of a death-struggle. "How much for a full draught!" exclaimed I, and rose to my feet; I maintained myself upright, although once my brain reeled; but the dire necessity helped me through. "How much for a full draught?" echoed she; "why, only a dollar!" "Give me the draught, and two dollars are yours." "Are you sure that you have two dollars!" "I am. Just listen!" and putting my hand into the side-pocket of my shooting coat, I clicked my fingers together with a snap: the bait took, and merely saying, "I thought we had taken your all," she gave the jug to me. O! the pleasure of that full draught! Having drank my fill, I gave back to her the pitcher, merely adding, as I again sank down, "I have no money!" "No

money!" shrieked she, more like an eagle than a child; and with all her strength she gave me a fierce back-hander right against my mouth. She must have hit hard, for I felt the blow long afterwards; at the time, I merely fell backwards from my sitting position. I felt her hand pass through all my pockets, and then, being thoroughly convinced that I was penniless, she chucked the remainder of the water full into my face. "A curse on you, you dirty blackguard! Michael spoke the truth when he said that you were not worth killing." Now, that was my first introduction to Kathleen O'Byrne; what do you think of it, and of her?'

'I thank you most heartily,' said Hilton; 'from the bud blooms the rose; and if Kathleen did that in childhood, what in womanhood must she be? Let us on.'

Again, having now to travel over wild and sometimes dangerous ground, they spoke not. Hour after hour passed, and still onward did Hilton follow Pistol Ball. The sun was low, when Ball, pointing with his right hand, cheerily said, 'There is our night's resting-place; we and our horses have well-earned food and sleep.'

Having tethered their horses, and spread their blankets on a dry spot, on them they lay, while their spare repast was eaten. Ball pointed out, in his usual clear way, all the main peaks and the lay of the mountains; he carefully explained the watershed.

‘If I draw through, we shall manage well. I know the country almost as well as one of its native Indians; but if I give way to excess, then your head will have to work for two bodies, and this land is strange to you. Tell me, if you had to strike across country, to where our hidden goods now lie, which way would you go if you wished to avoid Docket’s Store?’

‘Towards that high peak,’ answered Hilton; ‘I have had my eye on it ever since we piled our goods in the cave.’

‘Right,’ said Ball, ‘and now, ere we sleep, for some information, which you will be glad to hear. Up some hundred feet above our heads is a heap of dry wood; to a common passer-by it looks like an accidental drift, tossed there by wind and weather. In reality it is a beacon which is placed there by the Indians. Do you mark a large piece of white quartz?—there—high above us: lean well back; lie down; now let your sight

follow my hand up the side of the cliff—there. Do you not see it?’

‘I do; but I could not find it in the dark.’

‘No,’ answered Ball; ‘but we must be up there ere darkness is on us. Whoever fires that beacon will have Indians here before morning; it is only known to their friends, so they also will come as friends. If their men are at home, we shall see an answering fire; but if only women, then the distance will remain unlit. If we advanced towards them without this warning, we should be waylaid and overcome by numbers, and some chief would strut about adorned with our scalps. To-morrow we shall have a long day’s march in order to reach the great chief—he with whom we shall have to treat in this our mercantile transactions. He seems to be the only man about their country who has diamonds: where or how he obtained them, no one knows. The fact remains, that he has diamonds; and for some reasons, best known to himself, is at the present time anxious to sell them; but he will sell them only for money; for hard cash, in gold or silver, no barter, no land, nor ammunition and arms; he will have nothing but the hard cash; and the hard cash no one will,

or perhaps can, bring forward. Some master of mines offered him a large sum in silver ingots; but he will have gold and silver in coins. He either distrusts all other means of purchase, or wishes to possess treasure that can be made at once available, whenever the need may come. Diamonds are valuable, but of no use in the common and smaller dealings of Indian, or, indeed, of any daily life; therefore, the great chief will have money. The day after to-morrow we shall make, I hope, a good mercantile bargain; and once made, the chief will come with us to Middletown, where we will, in the bank itself, exchange gold and silver coins for the diamonds, get out of this wild country and hasten to England, really rich and prosperous men. Think of that! England and wealth! home and all its pleasures! but,' and here Ball stopped, threw his hands up above his head, and almost screamed,

'O heavens! O heavens! Can I escape? Will the fearful vice come on me? Alas! for the man who does not possess his own soul.'

He sat down, and covering his face with his hands, he long remained silent. Was it in thought? Was it in prayer? This silence was passed by Hilton in deep meditation on

the future ; he could see danger, but none, that to him seemed insuperable. The great difficulty was this man himself, who would not have shown him this road to wealth unless under the promise that he, Hilton, should watch over him, Ball, like a brother. Hilton when he first met Ball, Pistol Ball, (and by his unfriends ' Brandy Ball,') thought of him only as a drunken backwoodsman ; then by degrees, Ball amused him by repeating all sorts of adventures in the wilder parts of America, and by drawing his attention to schemes of wealth-hunting. As their intimacy increased, so to Hilton's surprise, this drunken wanderer became more and more sober, became more refined in language and in habits, and at last, one evening, developed a plan by which they both should become successful men. At first it had been repugnant to Hilton's feelings, to join so wretched a debauchee, in any adventure whatsoever ; but Ball, by a development of an unexpected degree of refinement had won on him. Every night some small progress was made towards intimacy, which at last ended in this long journey. Hilton had always appreciated the difficulty of working conjointly with one given at times to such a terrible folly, still

he rejoiced at this opportunity of work, and now more so than ever, as he had chanced, from previous scientific study, to have acquired a knowledge of diamonds and precious stones. Ball had never before this evening mentioned the actual nature of their pursuit, but he had instructed his companion, who had arranged everything to meet this event. Hilton rejoiced over it, as it showed that whatsoever other misfortune ruled Ball's life, still he, Ball, had brain and a heart, and but for one apparently inherent vice, would have attempted this hoped for success all alone. It moreover all showed that Ball would exert himself to the utmost, in order to crown their risks with a most substantial reward. A heavy hand, arousing him from his reverie, was here laid on his shoulder.

‘Now, let us scale the beacon!’ exclaimed Ball; we have just time to reach it ere darkness cover the land.’

Springing up, Hilton followed Ball, and by a rise of a few hundred feet, what a wonderful change was there! Their fire glowed below in a sheltered and now darkened nook, while, on the spot where they now stood, the bright evening sun still shone; and far, far away stretched the most exten-

sive and beautiful of views; high hills and one large valley, through which meandered a broad river; on every side hill and dale, and falling cataracts; and far to their right snow-clad mountains.

‘Look well at that view,’ said Ball, ‘and let me point to that far-distant mountain; because, if you can trace a deep valley about half-way between us and it, remember that is the valley where stands Docket’s Store, and our goods in the cave; and there, to its left, is the high peak which you have already recognised.’

‘I mark it well!’ answered Hilton, ‘and, by your careful instructions, seem to know all.’

‘Aye,’ continued Ball, ‘no one knows what a day—nay, even a minute—may bring forth! Now, before I fire this beacon, say, Are you still resolved, at any price, to play out our game?’

‘At any price I will see it and you through. Fire the beacon, and as it burns up, we can by its light find our way down. A good sleep has its use.’

‘Fired it is,’ said Ball, ‘and we committed to as wild and as bloodstained a set of rascals, as America has ever produced.

They thirst for the blood and scalps of pale faces ; but they know me, and their thirst for murder will be slacked by their longing after gold. They thoroughly understand the value and convenience of money. There is the answering light ; so the warriors are at home. Come along ; I am dead tired.'

Soon they were below in the sheltered nook ; and long ere the light above had died out, they slept the sleep of weary, yet strong men. Hilton had given himself utterly up to the guidance of his companion ; in whom he every day felt more and more confidence ; in whom he found a fund of education and knowledge, and also (still more to his surprise) courteous manners ; he had, moreover, learnt to respect Ball's cleverness and self-restraint ; but ere he had fallen asleep, there had come across him a strange thought ; and this idea was, that, perhaps, after all, his companion had lured him thus far from civilisation, in order to make a tool of him, to rob him of his three thousand pounds, and then cast his carcass to the crows ; or what was much the same, leave him as a prey to the Indians. In all Ball's adventures and transactions,—in this very district, there always cropped up, amid successes, the death, or disappearance, appar-

ently for ever, of his then companion. Even in the account of the first meeting with Kathleen O'Byrne, she hinted at his then companion's death ; and so, again and again, the same success, the same drunkenness, the same disappearance ; and, after a time, another unproductive attempt to win wealth : but again it occurred to him that if treachery were intended, why had Ball told him all these detailed facts ? Why not have drawn him on to a seemingly new undertaking, and at the proper time quietly dropped him into the *oubliette* of murder, or of Indian torture ? These thoughts had passed through his mind and then sleep had blotted them out. How long he had slept he knew not ; it must have been hours ; it appeared to be only a few minutes, when a hand was slightly laid on his arm. At the first touch he opened his eyes, and instinctively put his hand on the pistol at his belt.

‘Hilton,’ uttered his companion, Ball, ‘we must have our last talk ; the time is come, once the Indians are our masters then not a word about our venture ; some speak English, and all are suspicious and treacherous. This, above all, I now tell you, remember two things ; firstly, believe nobody and nothing,

not even me; secondly, remember, and never let it out of your mind, that I am the worst of drunkards. I struggle—and for a time struggle successfully—but, as I before said, the success comes just at the moment when drinking is the greatest drawback, the greatest curse. I can face hardships—can face hunger and thirst—misery. When others are overcome by fatigue and cold, I become a leader, and men look up to me, as his soldiers did to Wellington; but success comes, or merely ease and comfort, and then, even as I formerly warned you about yourself—then I fail. When my best friend, when one whom I love most on earth needs me, then, oh Heavens! I am drunk—hopelessly drunk—mad drunk—and then follows a long blank of fevered life, and idiotic seeking for strong drink; and when I do return to consciousness, I thank God who let my last penny be spent, or robbed, ere my life was sacrificed to that stronghold of the devil, drunkenness. Remember! trust me not, from the moment that success inclines; aye, merely inclines towards us; then trust me not. Remember! I say, once and for all; remember and beware.'

Hilton was about to speak, but Ball, again pressing his hand on the other's arm, continued—

‘Listen! resist not these Indians; they may, perhaps, disarm us; we must take our chance of life or death. They will feed and lodge us well. Attempt no treachery towards them; their cunning surpasses ours. Look well to the diamonds, and trust not the great chief—he, amongst rascals, is the greatest rascal of all—but he must have money. Let me not make the bargain. I not only know Indian ways—they also know me of old; but you must watch. It may, perhaps, be best for you to do the work; the great chief is up to every dodge, and will cheat us if he can; and you understand diamonds. Let time determine. Now, to our first move in the face of these Indians; they will soon be here, and will respect us all the more, if we are not only on the watch, but equal to them, at our first meeting. So, wrap up our blankets, as if we were still in them; put a bunch of dry firewood under them. Good! Now, come to our horses; they will smell the Indians long before we shall perceive them, and long before they are here. Now, not another word; let all

be silence until we and the Indians meet; and even then be silent, if you can; they will respect you and us all the more.'

Cautiously, silently, did the two men rise and creep towards their horses. Ball twice stopped to listen. He patted his horse, so as to let the animal fully recognise him. Hilton did the same. Then they tethered the nags in a more open spot, where also was good feeding. Under cover of the branches of a wide-spreading fir tree (which grew somewhat above the spot where there horses were) did the two companions lie down. Time passed, but they slept not. At last, just as the smallest change towards morning light came on the sky, the two horses threw up their heads. Ball gave Hilton a slight but warning touch. Then he pointed to the horses, and afterwards to their sleeping nook. Hilton understood that the horses smelt the Indians now on that spot. Again Ball touched Hilton and pointed to the horses, which, with ears erect and well forward, turned another way. Hilton again understood that the Indians were cautiously moving, and guessed that they hoped to surprise the 'white-faces.' Presently the animals shied away, and came

so far as their tethers would allow them towards the two Englishmen. Ball, signing to Hilton to follow, crept down the small hillock, and, just as an Indian laid his hand on the horse's neck, Ball laid his own hand on the Indian's wrist. Hilton stood by his horse and fixed his attention on what looked like a heap of drift wood or a bush; but he well knew that it was an Indian. Ball uttered softly the Indian word for 'Peace,' the Indian answered with the same; and then somewhat more loudly, but still cautiously, a shout, 'Ha!' when some Indians strolled into the open. Soon they and the two Englishmen had re-lighted the night-fire, and venison, which the Indians had brought, was cooked for the morning meal. Hilton (having now fully realised how completely he was in the power of these red men) loosened from around his neck a leather thong, to which was attached a small, but perfectly-made revolver—a revolver so small, that it appeared like an infant's toy—and yet, at close quarters, its six barrels carried each its separate death. He fastened the thong round the uppermost part of his leg (he had often before practised it), so that the tiny pistol, hidden within the innermost

folds of his garments, might quickly be handled for defence, or otherwise. To Hilton's surprise, and contrary to the words of Ball, the Indians, although they themselves went on foot, allowed the two Englishmen to mount their horses. After a few miles of travel, the natives came to where their own horses were carefully tethered; they also mounted, and all rode on together. By-and-bye the sun rose, over all; clouds and mist vanished in its blaze; below and around them, the most majestic and beautiful country was displayed. Little did the Indians reckon of beauty or unequalled landscape; they, while travelling, marked each bent blade of grass, or some stone slightly moved in the sand, or a leaf flattened on the ground, generally in silence; but sometimes, by a few lowly muttered words, unravelled what living being had passed that way, or how long since had the spot been stamped. At mid-day they halted during some two hours, in order to allow their hungry horses to eat and rest, while they themselves partook of a simple and frugal repast; then on again, up the sides of magnificent mountains, or down into the shades of some deep valley; often under a burning sun,

or again beneath the overhanging branches of enormous trees. At night, food and rest. Before sunrise they were again in the saddle. Long before noon there was a halt at a small Indian encampment, where the Englishmen were deprived of their horses, and all went forward on foot. Some two hours before nightfall another and far more considerable encampment was reached. The two friends were conducted to a wigwam apart from all others. Here, for the first time while in company with the Indians, did Ball and Hilton interchange a few words. These were very few.

‘Remember,’ said Ball—‘remember all I have told you,’ and in dumb-show he impressed on his companion that their words would be listened to, and although in English, nevertheless understood.

‘As we came across the camp,’ said Hilton, ‘I marked the imprint of a white man’s shoe.’

‘It matters not. Now let us seem to sleep.’

In silence they lay until food and water were brought, and even then in silence did they eat. The repast over, they again reclined on their beds of skins, and soon from the appearance passed to the reality of deep,

refreshing slumber. Next morning early, Hilton sought the neighbouring stream, and by a good swim in its cool waters refreshed himself. Beneath the spreading branches of a large tree he had placed his clothes: while waiting here until the drops of water had rolled or evaporated from off him, he marked a tall, spare man pass on towards the principal wigwam—the wigwam which Hilton easily perceived to be the dwelling of the great chief. He marked this man carefully: not only did he appear to be a United States white man, but Hilton recognised him to be one whom, in days gone by, on Canadian soil, he had often seen, and not unfrequently in the society of Pistol Ball. Hilton let him pass into the wigwam, and then, having speedily dressed, hurried to where he and Ball had lodging during the night. Twice he walked round this wigwam in order to be assured that no listener was there. Entering, he said,

‘Ball, here, in this very camp, I have seen one who, last winter, was in your company while you and I were busy with our preparations.’

‘Who can that be?’ answered Ball.

‘A tall American—appears to be between

forty and fifty years of age, very spare, chews tobacco, walks with his legs far apart, struggling, as if he were comfortable nowhere but in the saddle.'

'The "Cock-tail!" by all that is wicked. Say! did he rub his left ear while you watched him?'

'Twice did he rub his left ear, and that is the very man! the "Cock-tail," now I remember that to have been his nickname.'

'Aye,' continued Ball, 'We have spotted our man, but his appearance here bodes us no good. Do you see? I may have, I do not say positively that I did, but I have a sort of half-recollection, that in a long drunken bout, I may have told him all about these very diamonds, and about this identical chief. A curse on all heavy drinking.'

'You know,' said Hilton, 'these Indians and their habits, can we do something? Can we not stop his attempt to forestall us in this our transaction?'

'Nothing,' returned Ball, 'simply nothing, remember whatever happens, we do not interfere; if he is kicked out we must not even look, far less must we seem to approve, even if it comes to a fight and blood-shedding, you and I must remain calm, as if we saw

not. Even if he wins diamonds, there may be others left. Now let us speak no more—only remember.'

In silence they remained, in silence they ate their early meal. When this repast was over, in silence they sat and alone, until the sun had already begun to dip towards the west; then an Indian invited them to an interview with the Great Chief. Ball arose and strolled off with dignity and unconcern. Hilton followed, wondering what the end would be. When ushered into his presence, they found the chief alone and seated. He waved his hand to the two Englishmen, in silent request that they also would be seated; he remained during some ten minutes still and without the utterance of a word, then speaking English, enriched occasionally with a native word, he addressed Ball.

'Mr Ball, you are here in search of my diamonds.'

Ball bowed an affirmative. The chief passed his hand into his breast, drew forth a leather case, and placing therefrom six large diamonds on the floor, said,

'There are my diamonds. In return for them I take payment in money, hard cash, gold or silver.'

Ball again bowed his assent.

‘Look at them, make me a bid,’ continued the chief.

Ball stretched out his hand in order to raise one of them for inspection, when Hilton suddenly arrested his arm, and said,

‘Touch them not. I understand diamonds, you do not.’

Ball answered, ‘How then shall we know their value?’

Hilton again stopped his friend’s hand.

‘Touch them not; ask the Great Chief what value he puts on them.’

The Great Chief waited not for Ball’s request, but answered at once, as if Hilton had spoken directly to him.

‘Ten thousand pounds in hard cash.’

‘Alas!’ answered Ball, ‘we are too poor for such a sum.’

‘Treat me fairly,’ said the chief, in a hoarse whisper. ‘Once this day has the Chief been fooled by a white man; it shall not happen again.’

‘If the Great Chief will insist on gold or silver coins, it, by more than half, lessens the value.’

‘Gold or silver coins and nothing else. I

know it to be a drawback, but I must have money—I must have it, much or little.’

They all three gazed at the diamonds, and remained in silence during some five minutes.

‘Lay hold of them,’ exclaimed the chief; ‘handle them; see their value; deal fairly, and the Chief will take five thousand. I must have money—hard cash.’

‘Touch them not,’ once again exclaimed Hilton, and withdrew Ball’s hand from the tempting stones—‘touch them not.’

‘And I say touch them,’ interrupted the chief, ‘handle them, inspect them, see them, see their value, admire their beauty.’

Then for the first time did Hilton address the chief.

‘Does the Chief understand diamonds?—can he, by inspection, know good from bad?’

‘I can,’ answered the chief: ‘what mean you?’

‘That we have not touched those diamonds.’

The Great Chief looked for a few moments thoughtfully at Hilton; then, as if having gradually evolved some new idea, he with dignity stretched forth his hand, lifted up the diamonds, and gazed at the six superb-looking stones. Even as he gazed his whole demeanour and appearance changed. He

suddenly arose, and with one bound sprang from the wigwam. Ball made a sign to be silent, and folding his arms across his breast, leaned back in an attitude of perfect rest. Hilton hesitated for a moment; then feeling the wisdom of his friend's example, he also leaned back and quietly awaited the event.

CHAPTER VI

SILENTLY the two English companions sat through the long hours of the day. Hilton, resigned to play out the game under Ball's direction, still wondered what the end would be. At last, just as the sun dipped on to the horizon, the tramp of many horses echoed through the camp, and the hoarse, forcible ejaculation, so rarely used, and yet once heard, never forgotten—the ejaculation of success sounded from the mouths of many red warriors. Ball's and Hilton's eyes met, but they neither moved nor spoke. Outside the tent, the Great Chief's voice questioned, and the voice of 'The Cocktail,' the American,

answered. A silence ensued, followed by a question spoken and repeated twice in a loud and most threatening tone. Presently the answer came, and even Hilton understood it to be a short Indian negative. Again the same question almost sounded like the growl of a grizzly bear. The answer returned was again the mere negative. Then came the voice of an Indian, and Ball, holding up his hand, said in an anxious whisper, 'Alas! he has swallowed the diamonds: be still, whatever happens.'

Again a silence; and then arose a yell of despair and fear, first mixed with Indian and then with English words; even Ball and Hilton were by name besought to help and save a fellow-mortal from agony and death. Again came the awful silence, again the yell of intense mental suffering—as it died down, the Great Chief spake one word. Ball again held up his hand to enforce quietness; and there sounded through all space, and must have been heard for miles, a yell, loud, piercing, embodying despair, great agony, and intense mental suffering. The yell dwindled to a wail: a voice, speaking as if from the dead, threw to the winds,

‘O God! whom I have deserted’—and all was still.

Soon the Great Chief entered the wigwam with all the courtesy which an Indian well knows how to assume. He sat down even in the same seat, which he, hours before, had left; he waved his hand to the two Englishmen to approach the table; then threw six magnificent diamonds, and in English said, ‘Buy! buy, while you can, to-morrow will be too late!’

Ball pointed to the diamonds, and said, ‘Now, Hilton, is your turn. Deal straightforwardly in your own natural way; let us have the diamonds if we possibly can.’

Hilton took each diamond, one by one, into his hand; felt their temperature, admired their brilliancy and peculiar power of reflection. The Great Chief looked on with quiet pleasure and smiled when Hilton, his examination finished, turned his eyes to the chief, who merely said:

‘Are any false?’

‘None!’ exclaimed Hilton; ‘but as good a set of diamonds as the world possesses. We cannot buy them; we have not enough money.’

Ball neither moved, nor seemed fully con-

scious of what passed. The chief uttered a loud ejaculation, and rising with slow dignity went with measured steps to the entrance of the wigwam, passed out, and at once returned. Some thirty warriors silently entered; and even as they entered, bowed their foreheads to the floor. The chief, standing in front of them, said slowly and almost in a whisper, 'Paleface, thou art one of "King George's men," not one of the "Long-knives." As King George's man thou art welcome; thy soul is righteous, and thy voice is truth.'

He shook hands with Hilton, and all the thirty warriors came with solemn dignity and did the same, then one by one they left the wigwam.

Hilton turned and looked at Ball, but he remained seated and half-recumbent—he made no sign.

'Man of truth,' said the chief, 'I must have money, gold or silver coined. Canst thou give me this, and in good coin?'

'I will give you three thousand pounds in gold and silver at the bank of Middleton; in exchange, I must have these six diamonds.'

The chief took the six stones in his hand, held them so that Hilton could see them; then placing them in the Englishman's palm,

(who at once carefully secured them in his leather belt) said, 'Much or little, all thou hast in the Middleton bank is mine. This bargain is made ; feed and sleep ; to-morrow at daybreak we shall start for Middleton.'

Ball rose, solemnly and silently he shook hands with the chief. Hilton, following Ball's lead, did the same. Having left the wigwam, they soon reached their own strange dwelling, where they found food and drink prepared. Even while they ate their food, Hilton took the diamonds again into his hands, and looked up admiringly. Ball answering his look, said,

'Yes ! it is a bargain, and a very good bargain.'

The chief knows, to a fraction what amount of gold you have in the bank. Deal even as you have done until now ; and all will go well for a time ; but not for ever ! The mighty chief is a mighty rogue ! beware of him hereafter !'

'But how have I succeeded ?'

'Because you have dealt honestly, honourably, and straightforward ! because you dealt in what an English gentleman would call a gentlemanly way.' In silence they continued their meal ; but as they lay down on their beds of skins, Hilton again spake.

‘What has become of the poor American? the cocktail?’ Ball turned himself on his couch, and looked steadfastly at his companion.

‘He! the Cocktail? why? they ripped the diamonds out of his entrails, even while he lived!’

Next morning, long before dawn, the two Englishmen, the chief, and several warriors, left the encampment. Throughout the day they rode on, still making the necessary halts, more, it appeared, for the sake of the horses than in order to refresh the riders. At night a small camp, guarded by some of the same tribe, received the chief and his companions; there they obtained food and rest. Again, next day the sun rose on them far away from their night’s camp, and long ere the nightfall the Englishmen rejoiced to find themselves in Middleton. The chief led the way straight to the bank; he and all his followers dismounted and entered; the manager advanced and bowed to the chief, who, together with Hilton, retired to the manager’s private room; there the business was soon settled. Hilton’s only words were,

‘Let the Great Chief have all I possess

here, it is his. Give me his receipt and let me go.'

Three thousand pounds in gold is a large sum. Even the Chief gloated over the precious metal. How seldom has a man seen a heap of coins worth three thousand pounds, and all in gold ; it looks enormous ! Hilton took the receipt, again shook hands with the chief, and left the bank. Even while the chief, in a voice of excited pleasure, gave orders to his warriors how to pack and secure the treasure ; Hilton and Ball mounted their tired horses and passed on towards the centre of the town. As they turned off at the corner of the same street, and the bank was hidden from their sight, Ball exclaimed,

'Follow me, or we are lost ! The Great Chief intends that we, dead or alive, shall give up the diamonds.'

'They were soon out of the town, when Ball, turning to his friend, said,

'Are the diamonds all safe ? I must see them.'

Hilton thrust his hand under his waist-coat, and having shown them, answered,

'How lucky that we have them.'

'Aye !' answered the other, 'say lucky if we keep them.'

‘What is in the wind, now?’

‘Danger from behind, and perhaps greater danger in front; but look well to your horse. We turn down through this opening in the forest.’

Ball turned his horse into the opening, and putting it to a gentle canter, added,

‘Let your horse pick his own way; if you keep him up to his work he will follow mine. It is, during a few miles, as dark as a dog’s mouth; but the turf will not allow a horse’s footfall to tell any one of our whereabouts. So, let us go on in silence; I shall not ride quickly.’

The companions rode on at a moderate canter and for many a mile. At last, when Hilton reckoned that they had passed over at least ten miles, Ball exclaimed,

‘Gently, Hilton; here we are on a high-road. I fully believe, that we have escaped our present difficulty. A red man once brought me and himself out of great danger by that very pass; little did he think that a white man could ever again find his way through it without a guide; but I have risked it, and done it. Does your horse seem weary?’

‘He does, poor fellow, he must have

rest, and that soon, or he will shut up altogether.'

'Another mile, Hilton, and at a foot's pace will cool him down, then we will have a halt. Mine is as dead beat as an ass after a donkey-race.'

In about a mile the road dipped into a small hollow, through which ran a stream, here Ball again led the way under some trees. They pulled rein, loosened the saddles, allowed their nags a moderate drink, cast a blanket over each, and so tethered them, where the grass grew richly, but not rankly. Ball, who seemed to know every inch of the way, led to a small hollow in the rock; there the two men swallowed each a couple of biscuits and a dram of brandy. Ball having once again asserted that he believed in their security, they wrapped themselves in their blankets. Ball at once slept, but Hilton still remained anxious, he rose, returned to the road, and left the hollow by the same way they had descended. He stood and listened, not a sound met his ear. A silence almost painful was over everything; still that very silence convinced him of their security. He returned to Ball, who received him with open eyes, waited one second for any word from

Hilton, then having drawn his blanket tighter round him, again fell into his interrupted sleep. Hilton mentally thanked Heaven for the past, and prayed for future success ; then he also wrapping his blanket carefully around himself, lay back and slept.

At the first break of day they arose, carefully examined their nags, and were soon once again in the saddle. Only a few words occasionally passed ; they moved at a slow jog ; and thus many hours rolled on, until the sun was high in the sky ; then came the usual mid-day halt. While their horses eagerly nipped the sweet grass, and they themselves ate their most frugal meal, Ball informed Hilton that he hoped that nightfall would see them once again at Docket's Store, where Kathleen reigned supreme—Kathleen, the beautiful ! Kathleen, the wicked !

‘So we, but you in particular, must make all arrangements in order to meet the great difficulty there. Aye, on you devolve all the danger and trouble. I much fear that you will have to meet it, and to fight single-handed, so anything you have to do or say, let us settle it now before we again take the road.’

‘What can you mean ?’ answered Hilton.

‘Do you intend to bolt and leave me alone, or do you expect death?’

Ball stared at his companion, and whispered, ‘Know you not?’

‘I am lost in amazement,’ said Hilton, and he, in his turn, stared at Ball.

Ball folded his arms; he was seated on the grass, and thus he let himself fall gently backwards until he lay at his full length, then raising his right hand, he softly said in a sad voice, ‘My drunkenness;’ he held his arm upraised as if appealing to heaven or to his own better nature, then letting it fall he suddenly sprang to his feet.

‘What do you propose? Is there nothing that you can suggest? Have you the paper which I gave you, only to be read in case of my death?’

‘Yes,’ answered Hilton; ‘it is safe; and as to any suggestion, you had better here at once pick up six small stones as nearly as possible the same size as our diamonds, and place them in your waistbelt. I will call them your diamonds. If the fatal drunkenness should really overtake you, remember to the last, that you have the diamonds; this will perhaps save your life: help us to keep these diamonds, and when once you are within the

limits of intoxication, make others pay to you attention and bring you drink, more drink; and really, if once drunk, then the more you have and the sooner you become dead drunk the better. So pick up the six stones, put them into your belt and learn to treat them as real diamonds; but as you value life and everything you love, do try to be a man. Let us hope that your weakness is not yet.'

Ball shook his head and sadly said,

'Alas! Hilton, at this very moment the longing is on me; and if the drink were here now, I should soon be drunk. So, forewarned is forearmed. Now, let us off.'

He stooped, collected, and picked up the six small stones, placed them in a pouch of his belt and slapping the leather, said, half-sadly, half-jocosely,

'My diamonds are safe; and whenever you again ask me about them, I will reply in the same way; so, act and speak accordingly; now you know the answer.'

He passed on to the tethered horses, and he and Hilton prepared them for the road. During their afternoon journey little was said; but thrice did Hilton ask,

'Are the diamonds safe?'

To which the other, slapping his leather belt, thrice answered, 'They are safe.'

Dark night was on them ere in the distance shone the light of Docket's Store. Then once again Hilton besought Ball to be a man and withstand his temptation.

'By all you love, I say, try, for the sake of all those whom you value, and who love you—try to overcome your weakness.'

'Hilton, you know not what you ask.'

'I do know; I have watched and have studied you. There is in you a higher nature; you sometimes speak and think as one of high education and feeling; you are not to me the low loafer you must often appear to others.'

'Hilton, you are right. I came out here in order to redeem the past; but hope deferred and repeated disappointments were solaced by strong drink. A wicked luxury, by indulgence, has become a necessity. Such is my story—such is my fate.'

'And do you,' interposed Hilton, 'with these feelings and this knowledge—do you not see that these diamonds will redeem the past? They will give us wealth and power—aye, everything man can wish for this side of the grave, provided we escape the robbers

and swindlers who swarm between this and merry England. Think of those you love now in our own far country—and, courage; pray to God for self-denial, and become a blessing to those who, perhaps even now, even at this very moment, are praying, are longing for your protection. Think of this, Ball, and be a man.'

Ball answered not during some ten minutes, and then again asked,

'Are you sure that the paper I gave you is safe?—is perfectly safe and legible after these wanderings?'

'Safe it is, and legible; there, you may set your heart at rest.'

'Then,' cried Ball, joyously and almost frantically, 'to-night I shall have a big drink. Let it come, if it must; but, come woe! come weal! a big drink is mine to-night!'

And putting spurs to his horse he cantered—almost galloped—to the stables of Docket's Store. He and Hilton carefully unsaddled and cleaned their tired animals; filled the racks with good hay; gave them a short drink, and left the horses to their quiet. During the short distance from the stable to the store itself, not a word passed; but at the

very door, Ball suddenly turned, seized Hilton's right hand and shook it heartily, then they passed in. Their entrance created no sensation. At the bar, Mike O'Byrne merely said, 'Good-evening, Mr Ball,' and unconcernedly handed to him and his companion a glass of Ball's usual compound. Dinner, coarse and plentiful, revived them both, after their long journey and uncertain small meals. Hilton drank but little, while Ball indulged freely. As night advanced, Hilton went to the stables and again watered the horses, replenished the racks, saw to their bedding, rubbed their ears, and so left them for the night. On his return he stopped and gazed through the open door at the scene within. Ball was still in the same seat, but Mike O'Byrne occupied the chair opposite, and each had in front of him a large tumbler of strong spirits. At the bar stood Kathleen, smiling at Ball, and showing her pearly teeth. Hilton sighed, and having entered, pressing his hand on his friend's shoulder, said,

'I am off to bed ; will you not also sleep ?'

'No,' laughed Ball ; 'no. Many thanks ; but we all here have much to talk about—old friends after a long absence. Take another

glass—do ; you will be all the better for it, after our long fatigues. Come ! sit down !—do !’

Hilton heeded not the inquiring looks of Mike and of Kathleen, but merely answered,

‘ No, thank you ; I am too tired, even for drinking ; so Good-night. I have seen to the nags ; they appear to be all right. Good-night !’

He sought his bed ; but even there he did not put aside his leather waist-belt ; he felt the pouch, and even opened it in the dark ; felt the diamonds, so as to be assured that all six were secure. He thanked Heaven that thus far his journey had been successful ; he prayed for himself and Ball, and then he slept.

CHAPTER VII

'It is come on me—the curse of poor Ball,' said Hilton to himself, as he rose from his bed at early dawn; 'but I was forewarned. I undertook this journey and all its risks and gains, with full knowledge of Ball's infirmity. Now that it has come, I will act truly by Ball, but at the same time with decision, and to him, in his present condition, with seeming harshness; above all, I will remember that every movement of mine—aye, and every word is marked. Yes; cunning shall meet cunning; to their deceit I will bring art, which hides itself. Now

for the first act of cleverly seeming to be that which I am not.'

Hilton leisurely dressed, and as he passed down the stair, he listened to each of his steps. As each foot fell on the step next below, he hearkened for any change of sound. From the thirteenth, instead of the mere crack of badly-joined wood, there came a sudden although slight rap. He therefore increased the slowness of his already slow descent, and still listened most attentively. He heard the distant fall of a latch in a door which must have been opened or shut. Again he listened, but all remained silent. He continued his descent, still wide awake to noise or anything else. As he turned away from the foot of the stairs, he met Kathleen face to face.

'Good-morning, Kathleen, he said; are you already coming down from bed? or do I meet you on your way up? Is it early morn or late night with you?' he smiled joyously and carelessly.

Kathleen returned his smile, with a frankness which might easily have deceived; but Hilton had been forewarned; and as she sweetly answered,

‘Oh, early morn I make it, and am really glad that you are not like poor Ball.’

He again smiled, and added,

‘No ; he and I differ very much ; he drinks every day and all day long, when I do drink, (and here he noted the interest she took in his confession) ; when I do drink, I drink in the morning. So Kathleen, dear, can you get me a bottle of whisky and a glass.’

‘What a shocking man you are ! Are you strong enough to stand so much ?’

‘I am rather low ; I must have the whisky, sooner or later ; do get it, if you can ; there is a good girl.’

She laughed a light and merry laugh ; and how pleasing is such a laugh from a woman ! She led the way to the bar, which still reeked with the smell of strong liquor, and still stronger and staler tobacco ; handed a bottle of whisky to Hilton, and duly received payment.

‘You should have had it as a gift,’ she said, ‘but I am bound to account for everything ; I am but a slave, and a wretched life I lead.’

Hilton well knew what the confession of a pretty woman means in this wicked world,

but parried the temptation, and stopped all further conversation by clutching the whisky ; and, feigning anxiety to take his ' morning,' he rushed out of doors.

When half-way towards the stable he stopped, filled a glass, and poured out the whisky on to the grass, then having raised the empty vessel to his lips, he appeared eagerly to swallow the contents. He continued his way to the stable, where he seriously and honestly cleaned both the horses, then led them to the stream and let them have their fill, tied them again in the stable, replenished their racks with hay, and loitered out, and back to a high bank, half-way towards the house. He here sat down, and pouring glass after glass on to the grass, yet each time apparently drinking, he soon emptied the bottle ; then he threw it as far as he could, and amused himself for half-an-hour by throwing stones at it. At last he hit it ; at the smash up he jumped, and danced a dashing ' break-down,' on the fragments ; when to his surprise Kathleen joined suddenly in his fun, and moved with both agility and grace. Hilton renewed his efforts ; for had not his dance, and Kathleen's appearance proved that he had been watched, and not by her

alone; had not her dress undergone a change, and her hair been arranged? and these things are not done in public, nor in a few minutes.

‘Kathleen, dear, we dance for a kiss, so dance me down or pay the forfeit.’

Kathleen again laughed, and so pleasantly, oh, so pleasantly; the dance seemed likely to last, when Kathleen suddenly exclaimed, ‘Oh, there is master!’ and was off like a roe. Hilton let her go, right glad of his delivery. He loitered about, during a long time, until smoke appeared out of the chimney top; he took the hint and sought the house, and enjoyed breakfast and rest.

During the next two or three days, Ball, in a state of half-drunkenness, utterly refusing all persuasion to continue the journey, occasionally strolled about with Hilton; he also sometimes gave a hand to cleaning and exercising the horses; still, morning and night he drank. Once only did he say a word on their position.

‘Hilton, do you know, Kathleen said you were the finest fellow she had seen during many a long day.’

‘I feel honoured by her compliment.’

‘Yes; she said that you drank a bottle of

whisky almost every morning, and no one could possibly have detected it, except by the smell of whisky on you through all the day.'

'There she spoke the truth.'

'Hilton, Hilton, if you also take to the drink, we are lost in every way. Do, man, rescue me and yourself from this awful infliction. Our lives, our happiness, nay, our very souls—all are in your hands. Save us, or we are utterly undone.'

Then Ball turned and strolled back to the store, and indulged himself during a few hours, by drinking deeply of whisky. Time passed by: every morning of the week except one, and that was Sunday, Hilton had his bottle. One morning he drew merely one glass out of it, and having first wetted his lips, he with the remainder sprinkled his clothes; then he hid the bottle, still nearly full, in a crevice of the rock, and on every succeeding morning he did the same, then carried each untouched bottle far on the road which led towards the cañon and cave, where their peculiar store of food, waterproof bedding, and other goods had long since been deposited during their journey up the country. On Sunday he

took no whisky; even in self-defence, he could not appear to break the fourth commandment. He strolled off into the wilds, and passed the day amid silence and nature, in communion with his own soul, and with God. He felt that but for one day regularly given to the holiness of rest, he never could fight successfully against the wickedness of Docket's Store. At last Ball's drunkenness passed into the state of fury; 'delirium tremens' seemed to be at hand; his knowledge of the past and his wishes for the future seemed gone; he danced when he could accomplish such a feat; he sang until he yelled; and whenever he met Hilton, he cursed him as a 'milk-sop' and thief. Hilton now perceived that the day for action had arrived; that the turning point of their destiny was come; that henceforth they would be very rich, or once again almost paupers. With true wisdom, he had not spent his time in idleness; he believed that all was so prepared that his only difficulty would be to persuade Ball to accompany him, and he perceived that his friend might soon be mad beyond all control. His next step was this: on the way to the river was a valley some hundreds of feet deep, wide in

most parts, but at one spot two opposite and projecting rocks came within fourteen feet one of another, and here a young fir tree had been laid across the chasm as a rough bridge. Hilton had passed this place every time he went towards the cañon in order to inspect, at a distance, their precious cave ; and very frequently he had been there, so that he might find his way even in darkness. In the neighbouring bush he had secreted a rope. One early morning, after his usual feigned appearance of drinking his 'morning' whisky, instead of remaining in the stable as had every day been his wont, he passed straight through and hurried to the afore-said fir bridge. He loosened the pegs which fastened it to the rock ; he passed over, and having brought the secreted rope, tied one end of it to the bridge, and the other end to a neighbouring tree, threw the bridge from off the rocks, and then with much difficulty hauled it up to the top of the bank ; he now drove into each projecting rock two stout pegs, so that, whenever he might wish, he could easily and quickly replace the bridge in its original position. Hilton drew back some yards, took a quick run, and bounded, with ease and safety, over the fourteen feet

which spanned the deep intersecting valley. He returned to the stables, cleaned and fed the horses, and sauntered into breakfast rather later than usual. Ball was there and apparently at breakfast ; but Hilton could at once see that strong drink was the chief ingredient of the morning repast. He talked kindly to his friend, who stared at him as at a stranger ; later he tried to entice Ball to come for a stroll, but found it to be an impossibility ; so, leaving him to his now habitual carousals, he hastened by a somewhat circuitous route to the rocks, again at one bound he cleared the chasm, and for the first time since he had arrived at Docket's Store, he sped to the cave. All was there untouched, just as they had left it. He with steady energy worked at filling with air the waterproof mattresses. This he accomplished before sunset ; and returning at a quick run, he had just enough daylight to help in his leap across the chasm. During his still quickly continued return he overtook Michael O'Byrne, who, turning, said,

'I wonder whence you come ! One thing is certain, that you have not, this time, been across the deep valley.'

'From wandering to and fro,' answered

Hilton, 'a fellow like me must have work; so I have been far away in search of metal—gold, silver, copper, or lead.'

'Well, and what have you found?'

'Nothing!'

'Well, then, come home and have dinner.'

So home they went, in friendly and cheery talk; and yet Hilton well knew that Mike (according to his own words) had constantly watched him in nearly all his walks, and now knew that the bridge was down. On their return, they again found Ball at his deep potations. Next day, Hilton, fully aware that he was watched, walked off at his usual time towards the cañon; but after a time turned off, and wandered far away among the wild country. At mid-day he lay down to rest amid the tall grass, and to leeward of a rock; suddenly his eye was attracted to the other side of a neighbouring dingle; there he perceived an Indian creeping stealthily along the broken ground, who, when he had reached a high rock, stopped almost immovable for nearly an hour. Hilton could plainly see that the Indian listened and peered at everything. At last he crept to the high rock, and slowly climbed to its top, on which he lay down, and gazed watchfully over all

the lands below. There lay the Indian, and there lay Hilton ; and the latter well understood the necessity of remaining perfectly still until the former had, of a certainty, quitted his post of vantage. At last, when the sun was low towards the horizon, the Indian half-rose, gave one long, attentive look over all around, turned, descended, and cautiously returned step by step by the same way which he had come. Then Hilton, making use of the same cunning and care, sought his way to Docket's Store ; and to his memory came back one of the last sayings of Ball, while still sober, ' Lucky if we keep them.'

' Aye,' said Hilton, ' we are beset with dangers ; and that Indian is the Great Chief. He has thoroughly made up his mind to again possess the six diamonds.'

CHAPTER VIII

‘DRUNK ! drunk ! very drunk !’ shouted Ball. ‘Do, Hilton, get drunk, like a good fellow. Mike, bring to this milksop a quart of whisky—hurrah ! how drunk we all shall be ! hurrah ! hurrah ! hurrah to all the world !’ and so saying, he drank off a large tumbler of spirits.

Hilton looked at him ; and there he sat the picture of health and of manly vigour. Hilton gazed, and mentally reckoned over the many and great dangers which now beset them ; and the greatest of all was this man’s insanity.

‘To-night were best! to-morrow, if possible! the day after at the latest.’

Thus said Hilton to himself, and sat down to supper. He ate heartily; and every time he lifted a glass to his lips, Ball shouted with delight and prolonged excitement. When supper was finished, Hilton rose and said, ‘Good-night, old fellow; after just one look at the nags I am off to bed.’

‘Nonsense,’ shouted Ball; ‘drink, man, drink! Here, Mike, stop his going, and make him drink!’

‘Nay,’ answered Michael O’Byrne; ‘let him go, and there will be more left for you and me.’

Hilton strolled out, and even as he had done ever since their arrival, he rubbed down, fed, and watered their horses. He gazed at the moon, and thought the night to be almost as bright as day; then suddenly came the thought, ‘Use it as day, and so steal a march on time.’

No sooner thought, than it was acted on. He passed out of the back way from the stable; and being certain of the absence of all spies, he almost bounded to the deep valley; and as usual jumped over it, lightly and safely. He hastened to where

the whisky (saved during many a morning,) lay hidden. Twice he toiled under its weight, before it was secure in the cave. He again examined all his possessions in this place, both by touch, as well as by sight: all was even as he had left it, the last time he had visited it; he felt the four mattresses, they were still full of air; he sat himself on the edge of the cave's mouth, and mentally rehearsed all the scene, all the work of starting all the difficulties caused by Ball and his dire intemperance. How long he had been there seated he knew not; his thoughts had wandered to England, and to all his hopes—hopes hanging on the craziness of a drunkard! It once crossed his mind, 'Here I am! diamonds and all! Why not leave him! and for the sake of those I love, save myself; aye! for the sake of those, whose every fate is wrapped in mine. The cañon and its stream are open; once afloat, I am free, and no absolute danger, no difficulty between me and England. The six diamonds, and two bank-notes, each worth a hundred pounds, I have sewed into good waterproof, and over this, strong leather. They are fastened round the upper-part of my left arm, where my

deltoid constantly tells me they are safe; I feel them now, and know that they are there.' He paused, and then came the honesty, the honour, the truth of an English gentleman. 'No, I have promised to bide with Ball, to save, or try to save him at every risk, and that promise is sacred.'

He rose and descended to the stream; and even as he went down there came back to him all the habits he had lately imbibed—the caution, the stealth of an Indian. He gazed and listened ere he moved from rock to rock. As he landed on the shore, and had finished his last leap, his caution bade him beware that in a few more steps he would emerge from the shade of the hill into the bright moonlight; he therefore, remaining erect, neither moved nor allowed even his breath to emit the slightest rustle. Silence was everywhere, save the everlasting roar of the water. His eyes inspected all within their range. Still he seemed to be alone, and yet his caution bade him wait. The moon made night almost as bright as day; and so he let his gaze wander over all the landscape. As his eye almost carelessly scanned the shadow of the hill behind—and he studied its outline, seeking in admiration

for new beauties—suddenly his thoughts realised,

‘ Can it be possible ?—how strange ! Is it man ? or is it an animal ? or is it merely the night breeze ? ’

He remained perfectly still ; another ten minutes passed ; they seemed an hour ; then once again one small and fine outline of the shadow moved, yet moved so slightly, that had not his eyes been absolutely on that very spot, he never would have been attracted by it. He stirred not, he knew that he was unseen. He stirred not, and at least one long hour had gone by ; and then (when the shade, cast by the hill, almost covered the valley) the margin of that shade moved, and the shadow of a human being appeared ; and immediately and totally vanished. By this, Hilton judged that this being was now descending the side of the hill, at the foot of which he stood. Again he watched and waited ; the event showed the wisdom of his patience. Some fifty yards to his left, there passed across the open space a human figure, with the speed of a deer and the silence of an Indian ; onwards it went ; Hilton, to his surprise, at once saw this figure to be a woman. He watched her carefully and

marked the way she held ; and the certainty came to him that this was no Indian, no wild native, no bush-ranging thief ; but worse still, it was Kathleen O'Byrne. Thus it was clear that she had found out his absence, and so far was aware of his usual haunts, but had not yet discovered the cave. Her descent betrayed this to him. He marked her disappearance over the opposite hill, and even then he again waited ; but after the lapse of about half-an-hour he started, and at his best pace, but still in the shade, towards the now bridgeless chasm ; and even ere he took his usual leap across, he paused in caution ; then with the agility of a roebuck he rushed at it, and over. Even as he sprang, he saw below him the flash of a rifle and heard the whistle of a bullet close to him. He flinched not, dropped lightly on the opposite rock, and fled to Docket's Store. He entered, and went, with the step of a cat, up the stair ; but never let a foot nor the smallest weight press on the thirteenth step, sought his bed ; and even while he listened for Kathleen's return, fell asleep. He slept long and soundly, until the next morning's sun shone cheerily in the sky.

CHAPTER IX

ERE Hilton descended, he sought Ball in his bed. There he lay, in a drunken sleep. Hilton, without the least resistance, opened the front of his friend's shirt, and saw, with satisfaction, that the belt was still round his waist. Hilton felt the division which held the six stones, the representatives of the real diamonds, which were safely fastened round his own upper arm. The false stones were there, and by close examination he became convinced that the pouch had not been tampered with. Hilton next visited the stables; after dressing the two horses, he mounted his own, and leading the other

he gave them an hour's exercise. He had occasionally done the same on other mornings, so he raised no curiosity. He fed them carefully, and looked to their shoes ; he had made up his mind to be off on the first opportunity. After breakfast he once again obtained his usual bottle of whisky ; as he strolled away, he appeared to drink his first glass within view of the house. The moment that he considered himself out of sight, he darted off to the fourteen-foot leap, and again cleared it at a bound ; he immediately inspected the fir tree which had once been, and he hoped would again constitute, the footbridge. Towards the middle of this tree there was placed a lump of clay ; this he removed, and lo ! he perceived, that this bridge, having been sawn almost in twain, was utterly useless. The more he examined, the more he reflected, by so much the more did he become assured, that (even as he long before had believed) he and every one of his movements were watched. As he arose in order to return, there came across his nostrils the faint fragrance of woodsmoke. At once he walked against the slight wind, which had thus gently betrayed to him that someone was within his neighbourhood. Exerting

all his skill in stalking, he gradually followed up the current of air ; at last, finding himself on the brink of the valley, he stealthily gazed through a small bush on to the depth below ; there, silent and almost immovable, sat the Great Chief, together with twelve of his warriors ; now, Hilton easily understood whence came a bullet, during his return home the previous night. Cautiously he backed into the thick grass, and soon again found himself at Docket's Store. The events of the morning made him doubly resolved to leave this place on the very first opportunity. Ball still wallowed in drink. At night some half-dozen rough fellows rode up to the store ; by their manner and general bearing, Hilton saw that they were familiar with, and strong allies of, Michael and Kathleen O'Byrne. That night he looked more carefully than ever to his two revolvers. He sat late, so as to afford protection to Ball ; and these two were the last to retire. Although not inclined to sleep, he nevertheless undressed and sought his bed, exactly as he always had hitherto done ; he greatly suspected that he was over-looked and watched. His short candle soon died out ; and once in the dark, he straightway felt the leather

band round his arm ; all there was secure ; he felt his waist-belt, that also was right. He lay for some considerable time revolving all his plans, and mentally striving to discover some new difficulty ; in order that, when it came he might be forearmed.

His danger came whence he least expected. A drowsiness fell on him ; he hoped for sleep, but even just as nature yielded to the soft influence, a light shone through his room, and recalled him to this world and its wickedness. He turned his eyes towards the door, and there stood Kathleen O'Byrne. A red cloak was her outer garment ; her long dark hair hung loosely down. The lamp which she had carried, was placed on a table. She stood motionless ; her face pale ; her large blue eyes, wide open, were fixed on Hilton, who, with a slight start, turned round, rested his head on his hand, and gazed at her.

'Mr Hilton, it is with shame that I am here, but I am so frightened.'

'You !' answered he, 'I should have thought that this wild life and lawless land had trained you to all and every danger.'

‘Oh! Mr Hilton, please not to make a joke of it. I am frightened by no vain danger.’

‘If I can help it, you are safe here,’ answered Hilton, while lifting a revolver from a chair he placed it on the bed. ‘Sit down somewhere, and if you are cold there is my thick outer-coat hanging on a peg close to you.’

‘Oh, thank you, thank you; you are always so kind and good.’

Hilton answered not; in silence he considered what possible object could have brought Kathleen to his room. Compared with the quickness of thought lightning is slow. Before Kathleen again spoke, his brain had run through all probabilities, and decided that cupidity, one way or another, must have influenced his fair companion. There she stood, gazing at him—and despite his knowledge of her love of gain, and her general wickedness, still nature forced the conviction on him that Kathleen was so exceedingly beautiful, that to look and contemplate such perfection was in itself no ordinary pleasure; and, there she stood, gazing at him, her attitude, grace itself; her dress, in colour and draping, perfect;

even the position of her light was worthy of a painter's praise, it shone on her face and brought it out in full relief, while her luxuriant dark hair—shining and yet a shade—intensified the effect; even as his gaze glowed with unwilling admiration, her eyes of heavenly blue ceased to meet his, they were lowered towards the ground, and her long silky eyelashes rested on her snow-white cheeks, then a slight—a very slight blush—suffused the otherwise alabaster statue, her left hand somewhat tightened the red cloak around her, her right hand was raised towards her forehead, as if to screen herself from Hilton's passionate, speaking eyes, and thus she uttered, through a deep sob, half-intercepted as it rose,

‘Oh! do not say you love me!’

‘Kathleen, I never have seen one more beautiful than you, in spite of myself I am lost in such admiration, as I never—ere this—felt!’

Slowly, gently—the dark eyelashes rose; again the blue eyes glanced, as if in each were nestled some brilliant star. ‘Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.’ Even as Hilton's self-command melted away—even as Kathleen moved—in the

consciousness of her beauty's victory, even as the devil claimed a triumph; there resounded a yell, a loud, a long-continued yell. Kathleen clasped her hands together, stamped her foot in disappointment, and in her anger, exclaimed,

‘Oh! fools, too quick, or too slow.’

She turned, and, while a hurried footfall sounded on the staircase, fastened the large bolt inside the door. In that moment Hilton sprang from his bed, drew his garments around him, and, when Kathleen again turned towards him, firmly, yet tenderly, uttered,

‘Fear nought. Look at these revolvers: they carry the lives of twelve men.’

He hastened towards the door: Kathleen, quivering with emotion, sought his side. The footsteps passed by the room and hastened onward. She whispered,

‘Betray me not; let no one know that I am here; come away from the door.’

Again the heavy footstep resounded, and she again in a hurried tone besought him.

‘Answer from the bed and as if alone. It is my brother.’

A heavy knock fell on the door and a harsh voice yelled,

‘Hilloa! you, sir! Whom have you in there?’

Hilton answered not: Kathleen—trembling Kathleen—drew closer to him.

‘Hilloa! you skunk! what are you doing in there?’

‘I,’ exclaimed Hilton—‘I am pointing two revolvers at you, and unless you leave me to my sleep, I shoot you through the panel.’

‘Is my sister there?’

‘Tut!’ answered Hilton, ‘no tricks upon travellers. No sister of yours is here. Go back to your drink and leave me to my sleep.’

With an oath and a fierce kick against the door, Mike O’Byrne again sped downstairs. The two stood close together listening, and thus remained long after all was silence. At last Hilton, removing his arm, which until now had supported her, said,

‘Kathleen, we are unwise; but as I well know your love of gain, I will first share with you all the money I possess, and then tempt you to something still better.’

‘Oh! tempt me not.’

He undid his belt from around his waist, and, having opened the several divisions,

poured the sovereigns and dollars on to the table.

‘Now, Kathleen, let us share this lot, and I will then propose to you another and a richer booty.’

Kathleen greedily swept together her share, and even, as she hastily counted it, wrapped it in a handkerchief. While thus occupied, Hilton gazed at her still, in admiration of her beauty, but also in hatred of the sordid way in which she clutched the coins. He brought to mind his promise to Ball—his love and duty towards father and mother. He silently thanked God, who had saved him from a great temptation; bracing his energies together, he again spoke, so as to deceive, and, if possible, make her an unwilling accomplice in their escape.

‘I hope you are pleased with my gift?’

‘Thanks,’ answered Kathleen, raising her beseeching eyes towards him. ‘Thanks, for your kindness to a poor forsaken girl. Oh, such thanks.’

‘It is not much, but you shall have more if I can tempt you?’

‘Oh! tempt me not, to you I must yield!’

‘Ah! now listen first, and afterwards yield.’

‘Oh, Hilton!’

‘Now, first of all listen, and you will find the temptation to be great. Ball, my companion, is rich; with your help, I will rob him, then I will tempt him away, and, in due course get rid of him—that is my affair; but on my return you must give me a half-share. Say, Kathleen, can you, will you help me?’

Unknown to herself, Kathleen’s eyes gradually lost their speaking softness, and became hard and inexpressive. She said coldly and most distinctly, ‘The cañon swallows all things.’

‘Does it?’ retorted he, ‘but it is some distance from here.’

‘A good horse will do it in an hour.’

‘Good again! I see how it can be done; thanks Kathleen for that hint; but—before all else; do you agree? will you swear to be true? If once we begin and you cease to be true, I will kill you; I will shoot you; even if I, myself, perish in the deed. Say, will you swear?’

‘Yes, I will; and by any oath you wish; but the mere hope of wealth will bind me.’

‘Nay;’ continued Hilton, ‘if you long for wealth, swear at once! and swear to be true

to our compact: and—do this, by the Blue Fire of Baal.’

‘Oh, that dreadful oath! I fear it; even its name! must I swear—by such a curse?’

‘You must, Kathleen; or I work this out by myself alone; or if I really need help, then from someone more resolute than you.’

‘Alas! I shall lose too much,’ and then she gathering herself together swore to be true to their wickedness, by the fearful oath required.

‘It is all easily done,’ said Hilton; ‘tomorrow he and I can start, as if to journey homewards. If I can manage such a difficulty, I will persuade him—by force or cunning—to leave his belt here with you; and if he shows any obstinacy, a little more whisky will decide it in our favour; I only hope that he may not be accidentally washed away in the cañon!’

Hilton laughed, and Kathleen gave a hard, unfeeling smile. He gazed at her; he could scarcely believe that this cold-blooded she-devil was one and the same as the frightened, pity-imploring, pretty Kathleen, of a half-hour now past.

‘Kathleen, do you still fear any of these ruffians?’

‘No,’ answered she ; ‘ nothing ; but I fear, if you should still wish it, poor little Kathleen will stay with you ? ’

‘No, Kathleen, many thanks. Now the less we are seen, or known to be together, the better for our undertaking ; only remember ! remember our plans and your oath. Now, Good-Night ; sleep is a sad necessity.

Kathleen once again turned towards him ; something of tenderness came over her expression. She came close to him—so close, that the sweet breath from her mouth played on his lips ; her blue eyes looked from their depths into his ; and she whispered—

‘Have you not one word of kindness for me ? Can you not pity me ? ’

His eyes flashed, and his hands trembled ; nevertheless, his high resolve prevailed ; he gave one kiss on her forehead, a tribute to her beauty ; then, drawing back, he said,

‘I am petrified in my determination. I came to these lands in order to win wealth, and, until this is accomplished, I know no other passion.’

Kathleen wrapt her old red cloak around her, deliberately raised her lamp, and passed from the room. To Hilton, she appeared calm and weary ; but when outside, on the

stairs, and unseen by anyone on earth, she stopped, looked back towards his room, stretched forth her hand at its full length, and rather hissed than uttered—

‘You despise my beauty; you despise me as a woman; let me once hold this wealth; and you—you cold Saxon robber—on you shall bloody and most thorough be my revenge.’

As to Hilton—in prayer and thanks he recalled his escape from a great temptation, and how his temptress had fallen into a trap somewhat of her own setting; and so at length he slept.

CHAPTER X

WHEN next morning the sun rose above the horizon, a cold mist hid its sheen from the eyes of men. All was damp and raw. Amongst the earliest risers were Hilton and Kathleen O'Byrne. He only once addressed her. The words were simple—'This day will suit, so I shall be off;' but his tone gave an emphasis. Her reply merely was—'If I can help I will.' But both meant much, and both were understood. He soon sought Ball's room; and, shaking him by the shoulder, 'Here,' he said, 'is your morning draught; let us be up and away.'

Ball opened his glassy eyes, and looked in a dazed way at his friend.

‘Here the drink is good, and scores of jolly fellows! Why should I go? and where to?’

‘To our next resting place, and there also are many jolly toppers, and so on towards England. Are your diamonds safe?’

‘Aye!’ answered Ball, tapping his belt, ‘here they are safe and sound.’

Hilton was delighted. Well he knew that some one listened, and saw the whole action.

‘Good!’ continued Hilton, ‘up with you then, and the sooner we are off the better. Here, finish your draught.’

‘I say!’ said Ball, ‘that fellow, Mike, has twice made an attempt on my belt, but he has not got it.’

‘Good again,’ said the other, ‘give me your belt and tie that bit of old rope in its place (and stooping down, he picked up a piece off the floor), you can thus cheat Mike, and save your treasure.’

Hilton put his hand on the other’s belt, and, to his surprise, Ball allowed him to unbuckle and take possession; and while the rope was being tied round his waist, said, with a drunken laugh, ‘Mike shall take

it next time, or better still, that wench, Kathleen, when next she comes to wake me out of my first sleep, shall have it,' and he leant back, and again laughed half-cunningly, half-heartily.

'Well, "up and away," it must be. Get your breakfast and your draught; when I bring the horses, get on, and off along with me; and heed no one.'

'Aye,' half-shouted Ball; 'what a joke it will be; and hark ye! I never escaped before this time!'

Hilton added, 'But now you will. What a laugh we shall have at supper, and a big drink this night!'

Time passed on. The sun began to clear the mist. Three of the rough fellows trotted away down the road which Hilton wished to follow; but he seemed not to heed them. Ball and he had their breakfast; the former finished it with a deep draught of whisky.

'Kathleen,' said Hilton, across the bar, 'go down to "Deep Ditch," and there I will give you Ball's belt, I have it safe. We shall at once take to the saddle.'

He left Ball at his potations; he quickly,

and at the stable door, mounted his own nag, and led the other to the store.

‘Now, Ball, come along, and hi for a jolly ride. I have whisky with me,’ and he held out a quart bottle.

Ball laughed at the sight, and, somewhat staggering, still was able to make the door, and swing himself into the saddle. Hilton allowed no time for thought, but spurred his own horse, and they started at a quick canter. In about half-a-mile, when the road dipped out of sight of Docket’s Store, (and therefore called the Deep Ditch,) there they met Kathleen. Hilton at once said,

‘Those three rough fellows who are a-head, do they intend us any mischief?’

And at the same time, bending down on the side of his horse, away from his friend—he held towards Kathleen, Ball’s belt. ‘I, you see, can now fulfil my share! Kathleen, you must be true. If, when I come back, I find myself betrayed, woe to you and yours! Are you staunch, and game, for all?’

‘Yes,’ answered she, ‘you come back alone! and alone you shall be welcome: let me have this?’ she added, when she found that he still held his end of the belt.

'If you have it, you will not open it, until my return?'

'As long as I can, it shall remain untouched; but if you delay, I open it.'

'Keep it safely. When we have well done this job, I know of another. Do you know the Great Chief?'

Kathleen nodded, and he spoke on; 'he has diamonds; do you know that?' Kathleen again nodded. 'Well,' he said 'I know where they are; where he hides them; he is on these hills now; in following him and discovering all his haunts, have all my wanderings been passed. Did you know that he was here?' (She again merely nodded,) 'Will you help me in this?'

'I will,' she answered; 'and hearken, if you turn off where you well know and go straight to the cañon, you are safe; none but a dead man can that way escape. If you hold the eastern track and try to slip away, you will be pistolled ere another sun has risen.'

'Good,' said Hilton; 'take the belt, and' (with a slight pause)—'remember!'

She drew aside, and they were soon beyond her ken. So far was Hilton successful; but he now knew that care and quickness could

alone ensure safety. The horses were put to a quick but not an over-quick canter, which sometimes broke into a gallop and was at once checked; and ere the hour was past, the companions pulled rein by the river of the cañon. Having taken saddles and bridles off, he hobbled the two animals, so that they could slowly retrace their way, and yet, if he should need them, he still had the power to overtake and use them. He passed the stepping-stones to the cave, and to his surprise, Ball was able and willing to follow. In about another hour the mattresses were afloat: two tied together below, and two again above, and fastened to them; on these were lashed the preserved food and the whisky.

‘Give me drink!’ said Ball, ‘or I am off and away back to Docket’s Store!’

Hilton reluctantly jumped on to their mattress-raft, undid a bottle, and holding it up, thus lured his friend to follow, whom he persuaded to sit down, and there receive his drink. While Ball, with a gurgling laugh, tossed off his first dram, the rope which bound them to the rock was cut; and for the first time, after many weary, anxious days and nights, a feeling of security came over

Hilton; but even at the very moment that his heart swelled with grateful joy, a bullet passed through his hat, and knocked it far into the stream; he, at once feigning to have been hit by the bullet, sank down backwards, when the dark form of the Mighty Chief sprang from a rock high above the rushing water; disappeared below the foam; and then rising close to the raft, laid one hand on it, and with the other waved his tomahawk, but ere it could descend on Hilton's head, the bright flash of a revolver lightened the dark cañon; and the corpse of the Mighty Chief sank, never to rise again.

CHAPTER XI

ALONE in the deep and darkened cañon these two men were hurried along. Two men! and of these two one was a raving maniac!—the other was one who trusted in God, and not on his own unaided strength and intellect: in all he did, he used his utmost energy and forethought; and having done his all, he left the issue to the one great God. When successful, he humbly thanked his maker; if he failed, he gave thanks of submission; it was not only the will of an ever-merciful and only wise Lord, but it was a kindness beyond the knowledge of man, the

very means of salvation to body or soul, aye! often the only way of safety to both.

During three hours of the afternoon they glided swiftly and smoothly, occasionally when a rock seemed to bar their progress, the impetuous current swept them clear; on, on, they went! Hilton watching and expectant, while Ball, still handling the empty bottle, stared with restless eyes on the stream and tremendous cliffs towering far above them. Once when they dashed by a rock larger than usual, he gave a whoop, hurled the bottle, and when it flew to pieces, seemed to rejoice mightily. Still forward they hurried, so that Hilton wondered at the speed; on and on, until suddenly the sun shone on their chilled limbs, and their raft glided into stiller water, and floated onward slowly—so slowly as scarcely to move. Hilton remembered the rich meadows, long since pointed out by Ball, during their outward up-country ride, and knew that now they had reached the only quiet waters for many a long and distant mile. He at once rowed ashore, jumped on to the grass, followed by Ball, who again gave his wild whoop, sprang up into the air, and at his next step tripped and rolled over; then, coming to a sitting

posture, looked with pleased cunning at his friend's doings. Hilton soon collected dry grass and some decayed shrubs, and ere long had, out of the tins of preserved food, made some good soup, on which the friends gaily feasted. Even as he finished his repast, Ball shouted—

‘Drink ! give me drink ! or I am off, back to Docket’s Store !’

‘Yes ; Ball ;’ answered the other, ‘but wait, until we are again afloat.’

Alas ! the moment that they were clear of the land, Ball, with rising anger, again shrieked for drink ; his friend knew that in his then state, strong drink was a sad necessity, and yet feared the effect ; but still, as the only means of quieting Ball, and perhaps, strange to say, of keeping life in him, a bottle of whisky was placed in his hand. Gently for half-a-mile they floated, and then the roaring stream once again received them, and seemed to throw them through the darkened cañon. Well did Hilton remember the instructions that he had learnt from Ball ; and wondered that the drunken idiot now gibbing opposite to him, could be the same cool sagacious contriver of all these adventures ; could be the wise

counsellor, whose directions, he now followed. Onward they sped; Ball drunk and sorrowful; Hilton gazing up through the opening of the cliffs, high above them, in order, if possible, to catch sight of the high rock, pointed out as the landmark of the only waterfall between them and the Pacific. Time fled; in his anxious lookout, he heeded not his companion, who, with a madman's cunning, had undone and swallowed the contents of another bottle, then with a bottle in each hand, he laughed, and rising, would have sprang into the seething stream. Hilton with one stretch of his right hand restrained him, but Ball turned on him, clasped him in his muscular arms, and shouting, 'Let the blue devils have both,' wrestled wildly. The sane man at last forced the madman down, but as they lay on their small raft, it was only by the greatest efforts that he maintained his hold of a rope, so as to preserve the lives of both. Ball, little by little, became quiet, and then Hilton, attracted by the deeper darkening of the cañon, saw immediately above them the towering landmark beyond which Ball, when in his sober senses, had said 'It was death to go.' He gazed down on his companion, re-

cumbent, panting, and apparently exhausted; he gradually relaxed his hold and reached the oars, so as, if possible, to force the raft ashore at the very first opportunity. The opportunity soon came; but even at that very moment the madman was again on him, and having the advantage, forced him backward, then sat astride his legs. In vain did Hilton struggle; in vain he pointed out their great danger; the more he talked the firmer did Ball press him down; still the stream hurried them on; deeper and darker became the cañon. As a last resource, Hilton passed his hand underneath his dress, laid hold of his revolver with the intent of wounding Ball in a leg or arm, and thus be able to regain the ascendancy. Unfortunately he had wrapped the revolver in a piece of caoutchouc, so as to keep it dry in case of accident. Thus hindered and before he could fulfil his purpose, Ball had seized his hand and held it tightly; there he lay helpless in the grip of a madman. He ceased to struggle, remaining still and silent, yet watching the high cliffs and the heaven, just seen through the opening, now very far above them. A strange swirl in the water seemed to have taken place, the speed of the current in-

creased, and then, O horror! they swept past a white rock.

‘Ball,’ said Hilton, slowly and clearly, ‘we have passed the white rock, and in a few minutes shall be swept over the falls.’

Ball answered not, but pressed Hilton still more firmly. Now they felt the rolling of their craft, and heard the roar of the cataract. Cool in the midst of danger, resigned, he remembered his promise to Ball; so, with the hand that the madman heavily pressed down on to the water-tight mattress, he clutched the rope which bound their raft together; while with the other hand he gripped his mad friend’s wrist, who struggled to be free, and must have yelled; but Hilton heard it not, although he saw the mouth open and the lips move. One, resigned, cool, and collected, with a prayer passing through his thoughts; the other, drunken, raving, yelling, longing for murder and suicide; thus the two companions and friends went down into the thunder, the utter darkness of the deep, relentless waters; down into that awful chasm where no hope was; down into lifeless chaos and irresistible destruction. During a time Hilton lost all power of thought; but suddenly he again tightened

his grip on craft and companion, wondering how long they had stayed in the depths; then came a desire, an instinct to leave all, and struggle for life; again rose the remembrance of his oath, and the renewed resolution to die with or to save his friend. The sweep of the current, as he struck against the bed of the stream gave him assurance that he had passed over and down the fall, and was now beyond the reach of its boiling fury; he crouched as much as possible, then made a spring from the firm rock beneath him, and he, his craft, and his companion came to the surface. Alas! the raft was upset and above him; he let the raft float from him, rose above the water, and wrestled to the shore; he drew the now insensible Ball up on to dry land; leaving him at full length, with his head slightly supported, Hilton ran down the bank for a short distance, and leaped headlong into the stream, in pursuit of the craft, which in a short time he succeeded in forcing to the land; having hauled it on to the shore, and thus secured it from floating away, he hastened back to Ball, who, a little revived, said, almost in a whisper, 'No more drink, enough is as good as a feast.' Hilton had very

quickly led Ball to the craft, and without difficulty had placed him in safety. Then once more he shoved off, and they floated on; even as they disappeared round a bend in the river, some thirty Indian warriors (even as Ball, while still in his right senses, had foretold) sprang down on to the shore which the Englishmen had just left; but the two companions had already gained a safe distance; now once again Hilton recalled the words of Ball, that, 'If they escape from the Indians below the falls, then the remainder of their journey might be in security; that they might seek the shore, cook food, and sleep in peace.' To his friend's surprise, Ball moved not, nor did he sleep, nor did he yell for whisky, but gazed silently around him; and if a bird, or deer appeared, he watched their actions with seeming interest. The stream no longer brawled through a deep cañon; and although they moved at a good speed, still the river was smooth. Presently the moon shone out, and Hilton having drawn a tin of consolidated soup from its fastening, let his companion see him eat a thin slice; Ball took his share quietly and in silence, and, to Hilton's relief, ate it. Through the long hours of the night,

Hilton never thoroughly slept; he watched their progress, and kept his attention on his friend. At last the east brightened into light, and as the glorious sun rose, Hilton, with a deep sigh of relief, thanked heaven for the coming of another day; he looked at Ball, who still lay tranquilly in a seeming doze; then it struck him, that after such a long and fierce bout of drinking, perhaps his friend was dying through the want of strong drink; he at once took a bottle, and filled a horn with whisky. 'Here, my good fellow,' he said, 'try a little whisky; it will do you good!'

Ball shook his head; so Hilton himself took a large draught, and again offered the remainder to his friend; but Ball, again shaking his head, said laughingly,

'Why, Jack, this is quite a new thing, I thought that you never touched spirits.'

'After such a ducking as we have had, and after such a cold night, a pull at the whisky does me good; and, believe me, it would perhaps save you your life.'

'Well,' answered Ball, 'give me a small mouthful, but it is quite contrary to my habits;' and he accordingly drained the horn. They fastened the raft to a rock, and went ashore. As Hilton gathered dry grass

and anything else inflammable, Ball helped him; and when their small kettle boiled, he rubbed his hands together, and smilingly said,

‘You have become quite a good cook; did you learn that while in the Guards? or where?’

‘In the Guards,’ answered Hilton, ‘and nowhere else.’

‘Well, give us some soup; it really smells capitally.’

‘Glad that you like it; here it is; eat it while it is hot, for it is both meat and drink.’

Ball quietly and sedately ate it; and Hilton, having also finished his share, again filled the horn with whisky.

‘Here is to all we love, and a prosperous journey.’

‘I am with you,’ continued Ball, as he raised and drained the horn; ‘they must almost wonder where we are; what made you breakfast out here?’

‘A fine morning suggested a pic-nic, so here we are.’

‘We should have kept our guns, and not sent them home; the keeper will never dream of bringing them out again.’

‘Oh, it is all right,’ answered Hilton, much wondering at what Ball said. He had almost began to hope that his friend had regained his right senses, but his last words showed that his brain was not yet clear.

‘Do you know where we are,’ he added.

‘Where we are? Well, the morning mist, and an odd dream that I have dreamt in the boat, have quite mystified me, but at a guess I should say that we have landed on my father’s favourite island.’

Hilton smiled sadly, all hopes of his friend’s sanity had vanished.

‘Well guessed! so now we will get on board, and go on.’

‘A good thing it is,’ said Ball, ‘for Mary will be quite scared if we stop out much longer.’

And so off they went. During several hours Ball lay quiet and apparently contented. At last he looked up at Hilton, and said,

‘I say, Jack, what did Mary say about our absence last night? I do think that the whole lark too much for a fellow like me.’

‘Mary?’ answered Hilton, ‘I never saw her.’

‘Well, then I hope you left a kind message;

you well know how particular I am, and, Jack, I know you are always kind.'

'Yes, Ball, I am always kind.'

'Why do you call me Ball? are you mad? or somewhat intoxicated?

'What am I to call you?'

'Call me by my right name. What could have suggested such a queer name as Ball?'

'To tell the truth, I think I am a little confused, and I am very tired; so just tell me by which name you wish me to call you.'

'Why, Jack, what has come over you? I am Robert, your brother; so wake up, or you will roll overboard.'

And after that, Ball talked of people of whom Hilton had never heard; but of all these strange people, he talked most frequently of Mary. Some days passed in almost continued silence, and even when they landed in order to cook and eat their breakfasts and dinners, very few words were spoken. One afternoon Ball suddenly began to talk in the following strain:

'I say, Jack, I think all our affairs are getting worse and worse, and the time therefore is come for me to be off to America. Believe me, I have thought the matter well

over ever since you won the toss. What say you to this ?'

Hilton (determined to humour the other in everything, provided he remained sober and harmless) answered, 'A capital idea ; but are things really so bad ?'

'As bad as they can possibly be ! so, look ye ! I will see Mary only once again ; it will be a terrible farewell !'

'Let me go instead of you, and thus save Mary and you all this trying separation.'

'No, Jack, no ; you have said that before, I then refused, and do again refuse ! You must take great care of Mary and the little ones. Believe me, the day will come, and it may be soon ; Yes ! the day will soon come when I shall be back, a rich and prosperous adventurer ; when people will say, 'There goes the wealthy Robert Hutchinson !'

Hilton heard the name ; he treasured it in his heart, and never forgot it. Still on they floated ; once only did they pass a farmstead, it was inhabited ; as the smoke curled cheerfully out of the chimney, and a herd-dog ran down and barked at them, during at least the passage of half-a-mile ; but of mankind they saw none. Ball watched the farm-

house, while it gradually faded from view, and said,

‘I almost thought it was the old Hall; a night there would have been sweet.’

‘No!’ answered Hilton, who would also have longed for a few days’ bed and rest in a comfortable dwelling, if he had not always borne in mind that round his left arm he carried wealth, almost beyond belief, the means of safety and comfort to all whom he loved, and riches for Ball, for the ‘rich Robert Hutchinson,’ Mary, and the little ones. ‘No!’ said Hilton, ‘the sooner we see Mary, the better; think of her and the dear children; we must on and on, until we see them.’

Ball looked much annoyed for a time; then, having crossed his arms, he lay back and slept. Still on they went, each day a repetition of the day just past—to-day, yesterday, to-morrow—all one and the same. One morning early, Ball awoke; he gazed into the water at the reflections of the bright sun, watched the flight of a plump of wild ducks, and then, turning towards Hilton, scanned his features earnestly and anxiously.

‘Jack, it strikes me that all these bothers

and hard times have much changed you ; have you suffered much ? ’

‘ Much ! ’ answered Hilton, still humouring his friend’s phantasy ; ‘ much ! and Mary is none the better for it. ’

‘ Mary ! ’ exclaimed Ball ; ‘ Mary ! Oh, do not say that she is ill. ’

‘ I do not say that, ’ continued Hilton ; ‘ I do not say that she is ill, but the sooner we get home the better. ’

‘ Home ! aye, home ! and give some toys to Lucy and little Robert ; aye, let us get home. ’

Hilton again registered in his memory the names of Lucy and of Robert. Another week and they floated between the banks of green meadows where herds of cattle pastured, and more than once they were hailed by some herdsman or chance traveller ; to these Hilton gave no answer, but one day early he espied a woman milking in the midst of many cows. He now pulled ashore, and having invited Ball to accompany him, he went to the woman, and after having bargained for some milk, and paid, he half-carelessly, half-inquiringly, said, ‘ How far to the town ? ’

‘ Town ? At least forty miles. ’

‘And what name do you give to the town?’

‘Lincoln ; but floods and fever have almost emptied it, and next steamer will rob the place of its last man ; it is utterly ruined.’

‘It has had its day,’ added Hilton ; ‘and when does the next steamer arrive?’

‘Well, in three days, and I doubt if it will ever come again. I know all that, because my husband is down there, in order to sell some pelts, and bring home our new stores.’

‘Good !’ replied Hilton, ‘and so Good-bye, and many thanks for your information.’

Two days afterwards, during the late evening, the two companions glided into Lincoln, a low and swampy spot ; no voices, no lights greeted their eager senses, but a large empty wharf, and a few deserted houses, showed that this had been the once thriving town of Lincoln. Hilton guided their craft into the shelter of the wharf, and secured it to a rusty iron ring, and then he and Ball (even as they had done very many times before) wrapped the blankets round them, and slept well and securely. Next day they cooked their breakfast on the now deserted wharf ; and Hilton saddened as he thought of the disappointed and even broken-hearted men who there had toiled, failed and died ; of the vain

hopes of those sick at heart, who in England waited long for those who never came.'

They arose and walked about the little that was left of the fever-stricken spot; they, from one of the few still there, received positive information that the steamer would arrive to-morrow; and he even pointed out the mooring where the vessel would ride. On the second day the two companions watched long and anxiously; but to Hilton alone came the exquisite sense of pleasure, which arises from a feeling of success, won by self-denial and firm purpose. He and Ball had overcome their greatest difficulty, but to him alone was due the merit, the courage, and, more than all else, the truth and fidelity to a promise: to him Ball owed fortune, life, and home—the redemption of the past—the wealth and affections of the future. At noon the steamer hove in sight; and, ere the sun set, the two travel-stained friends were on board. Hilton silently gave heartfelt thanks for their safety; and, to his surprise, he heard Ball, as they lay that night in their berths, say prayers and return thanks for his own and 'Jack's' blessings. Hilton, during the darkness, extracted an hundred pound note from the waterproof

fastening around his left arm, and placed it in his waistbelt amid the coins which Kathleen O'Byrne had shared with him. He and Ball next day emptied their mattress-raft of air, and carefully packed them, and all else they possessed, in two large bundles. They thoroughly enjoyed the run in the steamer so far as Panama, the food, the rest, and total absence of care. They crossed the Isthmus in the railway, and so on to the Atlantic side. It is a well-known journey, and they followed the usual route. While they crossed the Atlantic, Ball talked of all his home affairs, but seemed to have utterly forgotten America, all its hardships and vice; his manner and general bearing were those of an English gentleman. Hilton learned much of Ball's previous life; but his friend never mentioned the name of places, not even of a village, or field; he gave no clue to the whereabouts of Mary, or of all those whom he loved. 'Time and the hour' brought them in sight of England; but, while all others rejoiced, Ball alone showed no emotion. The steamer passed up the Thames, still Ball showed no interest, and Hilton felt confirmed in his fear, that his friend might never regain his perfect senses. They landed, and drove

to a large and good hotel ; still Ball accommodated himself to everything, but, as usual, took all that happened as if it were nothing new, nothing different from his daily life. Hilton after due caution and information disposed of the smallest of the six diamonds, and delighted the purchaser by accepting the sum of thirty thousand pounds. Being now doubly assured of their wealth, he wrote to his father and mother, a letter to each, informing them of his return to England, and saying that he had been most successful.

Hilton's first care for his friend was to have a very experienced and well-recommended keeper, who was called, and assumed the duties of, a valet, and thus was always in actual attendance on Ball, or otherwise able to observe his movements ; but Ball's manners and actions were quiet and harmless, and although Hilton gave several cheerful dinners to the best men among his old acquaintance, and although champagne and other wines were frequently brought round, still Ball was moderate and abstemious, even with coffee he resolutely refused a *chasse*, and would laughingly add, 'no wise man ever touches spirits.' Sir Gwillim Mewse attended him, and listened with the greatest interest to all

the adventures and difficulties undergone by his patient; but, although he gave hopes that some accidental turn in his mind, some well-known object, or sudden recognition of an old friend, might recall him to his former self, nevertheless he could pronounce no certain opinion, nor point out any peculiar treatment.

‘Cultivate his general health, and let him live in comfort and contentment, and leave the rest to a wise Providence.’

Hilton visited his parents, and rejoiced them greatly, not only by his safe return and his improved appearance, his past adventures and vigorous health, but also by his accounts of his lately acquired wealth. Let no one despise wealth; it may sometimes be the cause of vice and folly, but it is the means of charity, the power to do good, and the great luxury of giving relief; its use, not its abuse, brings comfort to the body and rest to the mind. For some weeks he indulged in the pleasure of filial love; and never was there man more recompensed for former self-denials, risks, and hardships. In the evenings, after dinner, all his adventures were related; and as the warm fire glowed and the genial tea sent its aroma round the room,

how both father and mother sighed anxiously over his escapes, and ere he left them, they also seemed to know Ball, his failings, and all his better qualities. They also regretted that their son could not lure from Ball one word, one sign, by which his former abode and life and Mary might be traced and fully discovered.

Hilton and his parents had now passed several weeks in a state rarely allowed to man: absence of the loved one changed into the soothing intercourse, son and parents joined in friendship, poverty merged into wealth, and old aspirations and righteous ambitions fulfilled. Unknown one to the other, but known by the one God—the parents and son, each in his own bedroom, gave thanks; and prayed for humility. Time glided on, and so the day at last arrived when Hilton (for so we must still call him) forwarded to London all his luggage, and determined to walk through the beautiful country. Farewell, for a short time was said to and by his parents; and this time (contrary to his last departure, when he tried the world, for the first time, as poor and unknown) he awaited breakfast ere he left the house; and although at the last moment he again patted his

mother's favourite spaniel, it was not while alone nor at the foot of the staircase, but at the hall-door, and while his parents smiled on him. How different—all this was—from the last sad, and silent, solitary departure. The sun shone out, and the birds twittered blithely; for many a pleasant hour he walked on. He lunched at a small wayside inn, and wisely kept in reserve the good food and flask of sherry, which he carried in a shooting-bag. He had a long walk before him, and like all good walkers took delight in it. The sun set amid heavy clouds, and the frosty chill fell on fold and field. Full of strength he held his way, until he became aware that he must have most unwittingly taken a wrong road. Instead of the broad highway, he was now in a long narrow lane. To him the adventure was a pleasure. Around reigned silence, which his own foot-steps alone disturbed; the road dipped down, where high trees rose on each side; and the soft muddy surface stilled the tramp of his footfall. His sense of hearing sought to gather some sound; but as he halted in order to thoroughly enjoy the weird pleasure of utter silence, America and its enormous wildernesses recurred to his

memory; Ball, their long ride, the mighty chief, his death, the waterfall, diamonds, Kathleen O'Byrne, vice, treachery, and the deep cañon. He leant on his walking-stick, and enjoyed his utter loneliness. Presently on his attention fell a gentle sound, low and yet distinct. He listened; and, after a time, it came again; it was a wail. Was it some small living thing preyed on by a larger animal, or some wretched being caught in a trap? Again sounded the distress; and he, having noted the direction, noiselessly passed that way; he stopped; still low, but nigh to him, came the wail; it sounded human in its gentle moan. Again it sounded, so distinctly, so near, that in a few strides he was at the very spot; there, reclining against a stile, sat a child, softly wailing; but, oh, how sad! how heart-rending was that wail!

‘Child,’ he said, in tender accents, ‘what ails you?’

The child turned round, looked up, and silently arose.

‘Have you lost your way, or what?’ he added, in a soft tone. The child, either encouraged by his gentleness, or compelled by

circumstances, answered, 'No, sir; but I have nothing to eat, and am very hungry.'

'That is all very well,' he answered; 'but why lie down and weep?'

'There is no food at home, and mother will not be back for a long time.'

'So you are hungry?'

'Yes, that I am,' answered the child, whom he now perceived, by her voice and dress, to be a little girl.

'If I give you bread, could you eat it?'

'Oh, yes,' cried she, in an anxious and earnest voice. He swung his shooting-bag round to his front; and, while the little being eagerly looked on, undid its buckles, took out a packet of paper, unrolled it, and held down to her a meat sandwich. How ravenously did the poor child clutch it! but, ere she clutched it, there flowed from her lips—nay, from her heart—'Oh, thank you, sir; thank you, and thank God!'

She slowly ate several sandwiches, but at last, even as she raised another to her mouth, there came a deep emotion across her countenance. Appealing to Hilton, she said, in a piteous, deprecating voice, 'Might I, sir, might I keep this?'

'Eat it, child, I have more in my bag.'

‘But, sir, mother so often goes to bed without supper.’

‘Does she, young one? and how far from here does she live?’

‘Not far, sir; just the other side of the village.’

‘Eat that sandwich and come along. I will give a supper to your mother.’

So the tall, strong man strode on, following the frail little girl. As they reached the few houses, which, for distinction sake, were named ‘The village,’ Hilton asked the child what food her mother had at home.

‘None, sir; we never have much.’

‘Have you fire, or fuel?’

‘No, sir, nothing. We go to bed early, so we do not need it.’

‘Can you show me a house in this village where food can be bought?’

‘Yes, sir, at the shop; but unless you have ready-money, it is no use for us to stop there.’

‘Ah!’ thought Hilton in his heart, ‘this poor child well knows the cares and rebuffs of poverty.’

They soon arrived at the shop; its light burned freely. He entered, and, to his small companion’s delight, bought and paid

for one entire large loaf, some butter, some tea and sugar, some matches and candles; and last, but not least, a few pounds of bacon. Having secured these in his shoulder-bag and pockets, he lifted up in his hand a faggot and tested its weight.

‘How many can a stout fellow carry of these?’

‘Three are a common load for a young fellow.’

‘Then give me three;’ and having paid, and pulled a strong stick out of one of these faggots, he hoisted the three on to his back and shoulders.

‘Oh, dear,’ said the girl; ‘how glad my mother will be!’

She led the way out, from the bright lights of the shop, into the obscure lanes and fields. In a short time they came to a lone cottage; the child opened the slightly-fastened door; no one was there, and all was dark. Hilton struck a match and lighted a candle, and then he espied the poverty of the place. He threw the faggots into a corner, and emptied his bag and pockets on to the table; then he and the girl together soon made a good fire to roar on the hearth.

‘Please, sir, brother is up stairs, may I take him some bread?’

‘Bring him down here; but first just tell me if you have a tea-pot?’

The child brought forward a tea-pot, and also a kettle; while she busied herself, and brought down stairs her brother, Hilton had filled the kettle; it soon boiled, and tea was made; and how the little boy clapped his thin hands together, and laughed, when Hilton cut some bread, spread the butter, and poured out the tea into the cups. Yes! there was a frying-pan! and some fried bacon was added to the repast, and the children ate ravenously. At last Hilton said, ‘I think, that will do! Who says grace?’

‘I do,’ answered both children together; and they both said it: then he also repeated the thanks.

‘Now, little girl,’ continued Hilton, ‘let us arrange supper for your mother.’

The table was re-set, crumbs swept off, and all made ready; the kettle was placed near the burning wood, fuel thrown on, and a faggot brought forward and unfastened, so as to be handy to supply materials to keep up the fire, in case the mother long delayed.

‘By the bye,’ said Hilton, ‘where is your father? We have not yet heard of him.’

‘No, sir,’ answered the girl; ‘we have none!’

Then you and brother had better get to bed and sleep.’

‘Oh, brother sleeps upstairs with mother, and I sleep here.’

‘Well, as this room is warm, I think you both had better lie down on this bed, and sleep until your mother comes home.’

While the two children slept on the bed, and their regular breathing assured him of the fact, he drew a chair to the fire, heaped up the fuel, then stretching out his legs and crossing his arms, he meditated on the strangeness of the adventure. Here he was in a lone cottage in a lonely part of the country, and no one near except the two children, who, in their trustful simplicity, slept soundly, close to him. Sleep gradually came on him; and when he awoke, the fire was low, the candle burnt out. He again heaped on fuel; and still feeling inclined to rest, he rose, looked around during a few moments, then lay down alongside the others on the same bed, and soon he also again slept. How long his slumber had continued he knew not; but

by-and-bye a sound awoke him ; he opened his eyes but moved not. A woman in the garb of poverty stood before the fire, which threw its glare fully on her. Ere he could rise or speak, two stout fellows approached her, and in a loud, rough tone, exclaimed,

‘There, mother, is your notice to quit, this day week, and if, in two days, you do not pay the nine shillings due for rent, your furniture will have to pay for you. Hilloa ! Bill,’ continued the speaker, ‘here is plenty of grub ; mother can easily spare us a snack.’

And having swung a chair to the table, he sat down.

‘Sit down, Bill, we have it all our own way, and there is a flask of liquor.’

They sat down ; and the woman looked on in silence. The man stretched out his arm, but ere he could touch a morsel, a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder, and a deep firm voice, said,

‘Here is your notice to quit, and if you do not go in a jiffy, your body shall pay for it.’

A thunder-bolt in a powder magazine could not have created greater dismay ; the two men rose, gave one glance at the tall immovable figure, and, conscious of wrong-doing,

slunk out of the door, and were no more seen.

‘Mother, mother!’ exclaimed the girl, as she rose and hastened forward, ‘this is the kind man who has given us a good supper, and we have plenty left for you.’

She hastened to light a candle, and then pointing to the table, said,

‘Look at the nice food; we will soon fry some bacon, and also make good warm tea.’

Hilton made a slight bow to the slim, half-starved woman, and in answer to her inquiring and startled look, said,

‘I have just returned from America; I lost my way, and this little girl brought me here. I bought some food as we passed through the village, and have shared it with her and her brother. You have nothing to fear.’

‘Alas! poverty has little to fear.’

‘Then,’ continued he, ‘sit down, and I, with the help of my little friend, will do the cooking.’

The little girl came close up to him, took his hand, and, looking trustfully into his face, said,

‘You will be kind to mother also, won’t you? Say it, and then we will cook the food.’

He squeezed the little hand, now resting

in his, and gently raising it, in his earnestness, slowly said,

‘So help me, heaven; if woman or child ever had harm at my hand!’

‘I knew you were good; and now, mother, I will make tea, and he shall fry the bacon.’

Hilton cut the slices of bacon, and turning to the hearth, busied himself with the frying-pan. He removed the bacon to a plate, and placed it before the woman, as she sat nigh the table; then he raised his eyes to her face, and lo! she sat and wept!

‘Fear not! there is no danger,’ he again repeated, ‘and even if danger should come, I will stand between you and it.’

‘I know, I feel it; but excuse these tears; we are so unaccustomed to kindness.’

‘Eat,’ said he: ‘food will do you good. Eat: and here your daughter is pouring out the tea. I will also take a cup. Eat, there! all here is our own; so let us enjoy the supper.’

He placed the bacon before her, and on another plate butter; then having turned his face towards the fire, he called the young girl to him and sat her on his knee. Once or twice did she go to help her mother, and straightway came back to him. Now, Hilton,

was by nature and experience a man of observation, and he could not help remarking that, from the beginning, there was nothing common about the child ; and now he noticed how free from any sign of vulgarity was her mother ; there was no smack of low life about her, her words, her manners—everything was refined. A distant clock sounded through the stilly night.

‘Ten o’clock has struck,’ said the mother. ‘I will take the children upstairs ; you can, if you will, remain here for the night. You are indeed welcome to all I have to offer. You can sleep in that bed, poor though I fear it is—and now, Good-night.’

Saying this, she lifted her little sleepy son in her arms, and accompanied by the girl, went to the room above. Hilton loosened his dress, wrapped himself so well as he could in the old blanket and counterpane, and having said his night-prayer, resigned himself to sleep—to the sleep of one who knows no wrong.

CHAPTER XII

NEXT morning, Hilton strolled early down to the neighbouring stream; a ten minutes' swim served him instead of a more elaborate toilet—a short toilet for an English gentleman, but a luxury to an adventurer in America. As he returned towards the cottage, he met the little girl, his companion of the evening before.

‘Well, child; so you are up, and about, early this fine morning?’

‘Yes, sir; my mother sent me to gather water-cresses, and here they are. See! how fresh they look!’

‘Good!’ returned he; ‘but how are your mother and brother?’

‘Oh, mother and he are quite well; and when we said our prayers, she made us pray for you. Was not that nice?’

‘Amen!’ said he; ‘Amen! But I scarcely deserve it.’

‘And what do you think brother said?’

‘Ah! what said he?’

‘He generally awakes about two and cries for food; but last night, when he awoke, as usual, he merely said, “Oh, mother dearest, I am not the least hungry; kiss me, and thank that big man;” and then he fell asleep again.’

‘God be thanked,’ thought he, ‘that I have the means; and that He has taught me, by poverty and experience of hardship, how to use it. Child,’ he continued aloud, ‘here is money; can you buy eggs and milk?’

‘Oh, yes; a little money will get both.’

‘Here then, take this, and get plenty of eggs, and plenty of milk; and remember that I have a good appetite. I am off to the village in order to buy what we need for breakfast, and also more fuel. So the weak child and the strong man, each went on an errand of kindness. She with the

reliance on self, like unto a man; and he, with the gentle heart of a child. They soon again met.

‘Child,’ said he, while he rested his fagots on a bank, ‘what is your name?’

‘My name? Mother always says, the less we give our name, the better, but’——

‘But what else?’ added he.

‘She says, that we are not to be ashamed of our name, only not to give it unless we must.’

‘Child, you and I are now old friends, and you know that all I have done is approved of by your mother.’

‘Yes, sir, yes; most certainly, yes.’

‘Then believe me, and trust me, that your mother would allow you to tell me.’

‘My name is,’ answered she, ‘Lucy Hutchinson, and brother’s name is Robert, and mother’s name is Mary—she is also called Mrs Hutchinson; but do not call her by that name, or she will weep; and Oh, so bitterly!’

‘Oh, God!’ exclaimed he, raising his hand up towards heaven, ‘Oh, God, that a sinful man like me should be so blest!’

He silently walked to the cottage, the girl toddled by his side, thinking the while that,

a man must be in a state of blessing and of perfect bliss, to be able to feed her half-starved and deserted mother.

On their arrival at the poor home, all was clean and tidy ; and little Robert washed, and in clean and neatly mended clothes. Breakfast was a delight ; for although the mother was quiet, not asking any questions of Hilton, the two children, and especially towards the end of the repast, talked and laughed as if care was not. Meantime, Hilton, while attending the calls of a good appetite, and doing full justice to eggs and bacon, fresh butter and new bread ; still watched the half-starved woman ; there was no affectation, no presumption ; but there was a dignified sorrow, a measured gentleness ; and as he gazed he felt assured, that this woman was the wife of his friend, Ball, otherwise Robert Hutchinson.

‘Come here, little girl, come here ; and I will tell you some of my adventures in America. Come, sit on my knee, there !’ and with his back towards the mother, he laughed as he looked down on his little friend.

‘Oh,’ said she, ‘it will be so nice ! But poor mother must go to her work.’

‘What!’ exclaimed he, ‘no work to-day; and, presently, we will all go together and pay the rent, and then arrange for the future,’ and turning again to the mother, he added, ‘I have promised to my little friend a story of my adventures, and so you must all listen.’ He paused, as if in thought, and thus began,

‘Some three years ago, or more, now past, all sorts of misfortunes and troubles fell on me, and still harder on my father and mother, so I made up my mind to seek the world through for adventures and hard work that might lead to wealth. I scarcely hoped for any success under many years of trial and hardship, but God willed it otherwise. After sundry adventures and many trials, I, in North America, met with a tall man who had good experience of that land, and all its ups and downs. He told me of hairbreadth escapes, of more than one attempt to win wealth, and so be able to return to England, and to those who loved him, but every attempt had ended in failure. He often had actually secured the wealth which he coveted; yes, coveted; but not for himself alone; it was for the happiness of others, for the comfort of those whom he dearly loved; at last, one day, he said to me. “Hilton; I have

not in mere idleness told you all these adventures ; I have thus spoken, because each and every companion has, even after our having won riches, simply betrayed and robbed me—or else—poor fellow ; been himself murdered and robbed ; but in every case, I, after risking life and all the monies I possessed, have returned to this very town a beggar ; and here again I am, a beggar and nigh helpless. I know the way to untold wealth ; to an adventure that will make any one who succeeds a millionaire, but my companion and partner must have his wits about him ; must be able to procure the requisite money, that I now cannot ; above all, he must be sober, and faithful to me ; aye ; faithful to the death ; now if you will swear to all this you shall be partner, and have a half-share of all we make ; what say you to this ? ”

‘ Well, child, after due thought I did swear to be faithful to this man ; to help him all through the dangers and difficulties ; to be true to him at the risk of life and limb. In course of time I got the requisite money ; he and I arranged whatever was needful, and collected all our many things together ; but, especially, some waterproof beds, which, in case of need, could form a raft ; so that, if

we and our wealth could not escape all danger and robbery by land, we still might try to come away safely by water. Well, this tall, good-looking man, or rather English gentleman (for I soon found this out by his manners, and by all he did) this gentleman and I rode on week after week, and leading our pack horses towards the high mountains in the far West. During our long ride over that great American continent, he instructed me how to meet and deal with all the dangers we might come across; and how and by what means we might overcome all and escape. He, moreover, gave me a small piece of writing, and assured me that, if he were to die, this paper—this small document—would help me to trace his wife and children; for he then told me that these were the loved ones whom he had left behind, and to them would belong his share of all realised wealth. Onwards we went—onwards, and still onwards, until one day we halted near to one of those very deep chasms, known in West America by the name of ‘cañons.’ Here we unloaded our pack-horses of all they carried, waterproof beds, preserved meats, utensils, and other necessary goods. He showed to me a cavern, the entrance to which it was

most difficult to find ; in it, by considerable labour, we hid our goods ; then on we went, until we reached a place called Docket's Store. Here, during several days, we rested both ourselves and horses ; but soon again we started, and in a few days, having journeyed up into the mountains, arrived at the camp of a great Indian chief. We had some trouble, but after a time we bought of this great man diamonds, at a price which in England we should call ridiculously small, but which in the wilds could not be found ; for that mighty chief would accept in exchange for his jewels, nothing but hard cash, good coined gold or silver. Enough, that we bought the diamonds ; so once more we turned our horses heads away from the Mighty Chief, and made our first journey towards home. Let the other adventures pass ; but alas ! my friend and companion fell ill, and on me devolved all the trouble and difficulty of our situation. At Docket's Store, where his illness compelled us to halt, they suspected that we had wealth, and night and day watched our every action. I deceived all the vile crew, male and female, by pretending a wish to rob and destroy my friend and companion. In their wickedness they

arranged that if I tried to pass on horseback down out of the country they would murder me, but at same time devised the plan that I should take my friend, on pretence of continuing our journey, to the brink of the deep cañon, to the very spot where was the cave, now containing all our hidden goods, and then and there lure him to his death. They said, 'No living man can pass by the cañon.' They wished me to throw my companion into its deep waters, and then return to Docket's Store. We soon had our air-tight beds afloat and all our goods tied to them. Just as we appeared to be safely off, the mighty Indian chief, longing to repossess the diamonds which he had sold to us, fired at me; his bullet carried my hat into the stream, then he dived to our raft and raised his tomahawk in order to kill me outright while still appearing to be insensible from his shot; but my good English revolver saved my life, and his corpse sank never to rise again. We were off, and all went well until we were swept over and down a fearful waterfall; my friend would here certainly have been drowned ere we could have been washed free from the boiling chaos at the foot of the cataract, had not I, mindful of my oath, with difficulty saved him. He

was inanimate when I drew him ashore. While I was absent in order to recover our raft he regained his senses, but from that day until now he has never remembered the past ; and although he has become rational and composed, he has never yet had the full power of his memory. The remainder of our journey was easy, and he and I have safely reached England. I often look at him with sorrow ; it is sad, very sad, to know that this man has unbounded wealth, while those whom he loves, and for whom he risked life and everything, may be in utter poverty, and may be even now bewailing his apparent neglect, and . . .

‘His name is !’ exclaimed the sad, yet excited voice of the suffering woman. ‘His name ? Oh, tell me his name !’

‘His name,’ answered Hilton, ‘his name is Robert.’

‘Yes,’ breathed she, quite lowly, yet most distinctly. ‘Yes ; his name is Robert Hutchinson.’

‘Yes,’ repeated Hilton, ‘I believe his name to be Robert Hutchinson. Sit down, or you will fall, sit down. He give me a writing, it is here ; now I will open it for the first time ; but tell me your name ?’

‘Mary! Mary!’ she cried, ‘but do not delay!’

Hilton quickly laid bare his left arm; loosened the buckle, and undid the folds of waterproof and leather; he held the paper in his hand, turned and looked at her, ‘He often has mentioned the name of Mary, as one of the persons he most loved.’

Then he opened the paper which Ball had long since given him in the far off Canadian town; and thus read the following words aloud:—

‘Your companion is Robert Hutchinson; I have a wife, Mary, and two children, Lucy and Robert; their home is Upworth Park, near Anchester. Lest I should die, I here give all I possess, or may possess at any time, to my wife, Mary; I send her my un-failing love; my last thought will be with her.’

‘Oh, sir,’ screamed the little girl, ‘mother is ill!’

Hilton turned round and hastened to Mrs Hutchinson, but she waved him back, and said,

‘I am not ill; how strange is all this!’

‘It is,’ said Hilton, most wonderful!’

CHAPTER XIII

NEXT day, Hilton walked to the neighbouring town; and purchased many articles of dress, both for the children and for their mother. He returned in a hired carriage; and near to the cottage the driver waited patiently, while Mrs Hutchinson had the exquisite pleasure of changing the poor garments of her children for new and suitable clothing. When they appeared in the poverty-stricken room, down stairs, Hilton received them with heart-felt joy; he suggested the idea of packing up the old patched clothing, and of keeping it as a memory of misery past, and consequently perhaps of

pleasure hereafter ; this was soon done. They reached the railway station, and (as she afterwards said) Mrs Hutchinson felt as if in a dream ; and sometimes feared that Hilton must be leading them to destruction. The children were happy, and enjoyed the whole journey ; while Lucy sat by the side of Hilton, with her hand wrapped in his ; her trust in his goodness was complete. London they entered at last, and in comfortable lodgings again improved their personal appearances. Next day, Mrs Hutchinson and the children were dressed even as their original position and their present wealth justified. Hilton and Sir Gwillim Mewse, M.D., had a long consultation on the subject of Pistol Ball, now recognised as Robert Hutchinson, and finally agreed on the following line of conduct : firstly, to let Mrs Hutchinson meet her husband in the hope that he would, and perhaps at once, recognise one whom he so dearly loved ; but if this failed, then to reproduce, as nearly as possible, the position, place, and circumstances in which he was when last at Upworth Grange. Accordingly, her meeting with her husband was at once arranged, and simply by her and Hilton driving to the

hotel and walking up to the sitting-room, where sat Robert Hutchinson reading the newspapers of the day. Alas! he rose, gave a kind nod to Hilton, and said,

‘Glad to see you, Jack,’ and then in the most courteous way bowed deeply to his wife; but no sign of recognition, even when Hilton said,

‘Permit me, Mrs Hutchinson, to introduce my old friend to you.’

He again bowed, asked her to take a chair, and conversed pleasantly and rationally; but there was no recognition, not the faintest acknowledgment of having previously seen her—her whom he still so tenderly loved. She grew pale, and tried to turn the conversation to subjects formerly most familiar; and still, alas! without the much-desired result. After some three-quarters of an hour Hilton rose, and the reluctant wife left Hutchinson in the same manner in which they had entered. Next day, Hilton and Mrs Hutchinson, under the guidance and direction of Sir Gwillim Mewse, began all the necessary arrangements, in order to place Hutchinson (formerly Ball) in his old original position, so as to make the whole appear as past, and merely a continuation of his former life,

and as if America, and all its failings and adventures, had never been. A heavy mortgage lay on Upworth Grange, and the Grange was certainly a *sine qua non* to the whole affair. Hilton's solicitor called on the solicitors of the mortgagee, but they refused all immediate payment, and remained firm in their determination to do nothing, except according to the terms of the deed of mortgage, six months' notice, and even then making the whole matter liable to all the delays and requisitions of legal reluctance to forego a good mortgage, with good security and well paid interest. Hilton, in his anxiety, called on Sir Gwillim Mewse, and having mentioned the name of a noble lord, as the mortgagee of Upworth Grange, Sir Gwillim rose, and said, 'Come at once; if there is one of nature's noblemen it is Lord Ancaster; he is no fool, but the most christian of men. We will lay the whole history before him; and I would willingly wager a thousand pounds that, ere sunset, Robert Hutchinson, or his trustees, are virtually owners and in possession of Upworth Grange.' No sooner said than done. Sir Gwillim Mewse's carriage took them to the noble lord's mansion. After a few preliminaries, Sir Gwillim told the whole

tale and adventures, greatly to the admiration and interest of the earl. Then the three were driven to the solicitors, who, compelled by the firmness of their principal, drew out a short deed, and that evening the whole mortgage, monies, and interest due, and all charges, were duly paid into the bankers, so that when Hilton sat down to dinner he might have congratulated his old friend and companion on being once again the owner of his early home and of his family estates. Nothing, of course, was said to Robert Hutchinson, but all necessary arrangements were pressed forward, and much to her regret, the wife remained separate and unseen by her husband. One difficulty suddenly cropped up, and that was, 'Where was his brother, Jack?' Until now in their hope that he might recognise his wife, all in the meantime had forgotten the brother; but one question from Sir Gwillim Mewse disclosed the necessity of finding him. 'Why does he call you Jack?'

'Jack is his brother.'

'But where is Jack?' answered Sir Gwillim; 'he must be found; it is of importance towards his brother's recovery. Where is he now?'

The whereabouts of Jack no one knew.

Mrs Hutchinson gave an account, how a considerable time after the departure of her husband, Jack had placed her and her children in comfortable lodgings, in a small provincial town ; had given her all the money he possessed, and had then gone to seek work in any employment ; and thus the means of living by his own industry. Hilton under advice and with the help of the police, began a system of inquiry, which he hoped would ultimately lead to the discovery of Jack, and remove this difficulty ; but day after day passed by, and still his activity and labour brought no result. Strange are the ways of Providence. He and his great favourite, Lucy, were in full enjoyment of a morning's walk ; it was a cold autumnal day, and the wind blew through all northerly openings, with a sharp and relentless sweep.

‘Look !’ said Hilton, ‘look at that poor sweeper, how cold and ill-fed he appears to be.’

‘Oh !’ answered Lucy, ‘let us give him something, and uncle (she always called him uncle) how nice it would be to give him a breakfast and a greatcoat !’

‘Would it child ? then we will do it.’

They approached the man, and Uncle Hilton gave him a shilling, and then added, 'You look very cold this sharp morning; have you had any breakfast?'

'No, sir!' answered the sweeper; 'No, and it is very cold.'

'You shall have a breakfast at our expense; is there any place near here where we can get it?'

'Just round the corner, not a hundred yards.'

'Show us the way, for it is the child's wish.'

So the sweeper walked first, and they followed; a few questions by Hilton were answered civilly and thankfully; then they having paid at a small coffee-house for a good breakfast, left the sweeper to enjoy it. Lucy and Uncle Hilton strolled along, looking at the shop windows, until, at a ready-made clothes warehouse they had bought a thick, warm overcoat; then they turned towards home.'

'Uncle?' said Lucy.

'Yes,' answered he; and then she said no more.

'Uncle?' again she presently said, 'Uncle, it is very strange!'

‘What is so strange?’

‘Why, that sweeper at the crossing!’ and again she lapsed into silence. At last they reached the door of the lodgings, and Hilton said that he would carry the warm overcoat to the poor sweeper.

‘Uncle,’ said Lucy, ‘do let me come with you.’

‘You have had enough exercise, I think.’

‘But, uncle, I do so much wish to see him again.’

Hilton hesitated at first; but his kindness of heart and wish that Lucy might acquire the habit of being charitable, carried the day; so he and Lucy returned to the crossing. There stood the same man, who immediately recognised them, and bowed while they passed.

‘This is my address,’ said Hilton; ‘if you will call there this evening at seven, I will give you a warm overcoat.’

‘Uncle, uncle, do come on,’ whispered Lucy; ‘I want to say something to you.’

They went on, and then Lucy suddenly stopped and said,

‘Uncle, I am not sure—you won’t mind, will you, if I make a mistake?—but, uncle,

do you know I think that sweeper is so like uncle Jack !’

Uncle Jack ! Hilton could not believe it. He looked back ; the man had just begun to sweep the crossing ; Hilton watched him, and stood amazed.

‘ He is very like poor uncle Jack,’ murmured Lucy.

‘ We will soon settle it,’ continued Hilton, who, having approached the stranger, asked him,

‘ Have you lately seen one Jack Hutchinson ?’

The sweeper drew back and looked steadily at Hilton ; then presently answered,

‘ Yes, I have.’

‘ Well, he has a brother who is in search of him.’

‘ His brother in search of Jack Hutchinson ?’

‘ Even so ; neither more, nor less.’

‘ I am Jack Hutchinson ; where can I find my brother ?’

‘ If you are Jack Hutchinson, come with me, and we will soon settle the whole affair.’

The sweeper did come along with Hilton, was quickly recognised by Mrs Hutchinson,

and thus at length by an almost incredible chance was removed one great obstruction to the plan of restoring Robert Hutchinson to himself.

CHAPTER XIV

HOPE, ever refreshing hope ! Mrs Hutchinson (the Mary so often mentioned during the journey down the deep cañon) revived under the spell of hope ; and hope spurred Hilton and Jack into energetic and joyous action.

The old house, Upworth Grange, was furnished and done up (as nearly as the wife and brother could bring their memory to bear) the same as in the good old times, when Robert Hutchinson lived under his father's roof, and his mother strove for his good, everyday, and all day long. His favourite cabinet was traced and bought

back at a profit to the intervening owner, of some hundreds per cent. The old gamekeeper, now grey-headed and rather slow at his work, was discovered in an alms-house. Right merry was he when once again he found himself in the old Hall; but he gravely shook his head, and sighed the prayer, 'May God grant it.' When Jack, (whom he still called, from old habit, Master Jack) told him how Robert Hutchinson was not well, but that they hoped with care to restore him to himself, and how in the meantime he, the gamekeeper, was to bring all the drives and coverts back to what they had been in the good old days. Many a walk he and Jack and Hilton enjoyed, as the while they talked about days long since past, and the sport never to be forgotten; but most frequently they followed the beat which had been taken just previously to Robert Hutchinson's determination to go to America. One day the old gamekeeper, almost breathless and quite unannounced, rushed into the breakfast-room.

'I have found him!' he almost shouted.
'I have found him!'

'Glad to hear it,' laughed Hilton; 'glad to hear it. But do tell us what "him" you have found?'

‘Why, bless my heart, I have found the dog. I have found the retriever. Master’s favourite, Bob. Smithson, the under-keeper, is off to the north—far north, many a mile from here—and he hopes to be back in time. If ever master knows anyone, it will be Bob.’

‘But,’ continued Hilton, ‘Bob must be paid for, and how about that?’

‘Here is the address. Twenty pounds is the price, and cheap, too, for so good a dog, although he fetched only five pounds when he was sold; and I hope Bob will be back here before master comes down.’

Hope was everywhere, and time sped on. At last, one fine October morning, Hilton and Robert Hutchinson left the London hotel on horseback; and although, on this first day they were dressed as English gentlemen, they, nevertheless, were next day clothed in almost the same garb as during their ride up country and their American adventures. Their experienced valet travelled on the same road, and arranged all their resting-places, and saw to everything; and thus they rode on for three or four days, during which Hilton talked of, and tried to recall Hutchinson (formerly Ball) to the memories of all their risks and successes;

but the only old memory which clung to Hutchinson was the old habit of calling Hilton by the name of Jack. He seemed to entertain the idea that he was on a long journey, and that he and his companion were engaged in some secret and profitable undertaking. The day at length arrived which brought them to the end of their ride; and even, as they rode up to the last hotel they would need to use, Hilton said, 'Here we are at Docket's Store;' but although Hutchinson replied, 'Then we shall have a rest,' still Hilton clearly saw that a real memory had not been struck. Hilton at once led his friend down to the river and showed him the four waterproof beds, the same on which they had floated for weeks down to the Pacific Ocean. Hilton and his friend set to work, and had soon reconstructed the raft exactly the same as the original. They then returned to the hotel, but Hutchinson neither by his look sought anyone, nor inquired by name after any one being belonging to Docket's Store. Hilton sadly pondered over all this while at night he lay for some time sleepless; he recalled many sayings and passages of ideas between them, and at last, in spite of failure hitherto,

he fell asleep with hope rekindled. Next day, in due time, he led Hutchinson again to the river; he launched the raft, and then he noticed the only gleam of recollection or old habits (always excepting the calling him by the name of Jack) which he had seen. Hilton had suddenly said to his friend, 'Are your diamonds safe?'—to which the other had replied,

'They are safe. Here they are,' and had tapped his waist where no belt was. He also rejoiced to see Hutchinson lie down on the same spot, and in the same position usual to him while on the American river. He tried to lure his companion into the same strain of conversation as formerly, and talked of Mary, Lucy, and of little Robert; his friend listened, but no answer came. Towards mid-day they landed on the boundary of Upworth Grange estate; and, although no one was in sight, still everything was ready for them. Hilton asked Hutchinson to bring the kettle and other things from the raft. They lighted the fire and warmed the soup; and then the two friends sat side by side, even as in the time past, on the banks of the deep cañon, and the long-continued river journey. Hilton emptied the soup into the two same pannikins, and

they used the same spoons they had handled in the Far West. Hilton repeated the same grace and thanks as he had formerly used, then he arose, and mindful of all Ball had once uttered, he said, while he pointed to the land on which they stood,

‘This is your father’s favourite isle, and here comes the keeper with the guns. When we get home you can say “Good-bye” to Mary; it will be a sad parting.’

Once again Hutchinson looked at Hilton as if some memory of former days had recurred, but it passed away. Hilton gave the pre-concerted whistle, and Jack, together with the keepers and beaters, came forward. They beat the same covers, and in the same manner and direction, as on Robert Hutchinson’s last day’s shooting; he was, moreover, placed as near as possible on the same points of vantage as on that last day, the same old keeper attended him, but, alas! there was no Bob, the favourite retriever, the dog of whom his master was so fond and so proud—Bob, the faithful Bob! Hutchinson killed his game, and although the old keeper began the day sadly, and shook his head sorrowfully when his master failed to recognise this old servant, still,

as the day went on, and Hutchinson shot with all his former keenness and skill, then did the old man cheer up, so that, when they all met in front of the Grange, and the game was laid out and counted, he whispered to Hilton, 'Why, bless my heart, he is not insane, as 'cute as I am; see how he killed everything, and marked them as they fell, but I wish, I do, that we had brought out Bob, for he is a wonderful dog, and has such pretty manners.'

They entered the old mansion; his real brother Jack, laughing and talking, as much as possible in the old customary way, led his brother Robert up the back stairs; it was a habit inherited from their father, lest their muddy clothes and shoes should dirty the main staircase. Robert Hutchinson was led into his old dressing-room, where all was arranged as formerly; but still, even as he had always done on board the Atlantic steamer, and ever since, he took everything as a matter of course; nothing moved him out of his usual composure and absence of memory. His valet appeared, so Jack retired, merely adding,

'We shall go to dinner the moment you

are dressed, and Mary is already down, so you need not look for her in her room.'

And Jack carelessly pointed to the other door. In due course they were all assembled in the old drawing-room. When the butler announced dinner, Mary came forward (and contrary to the usual habits of life,) took her husband's arm, and the other guests and friends duly followed. Sir Gwillim Mewse marked him carefully, and as they passed into the dining-room, said to Hilton,

'I do not yet despair, he knew the way from the drawing-room to the dining-room, placed his wife at the head of the table, and without hesitation, sat himself at the opposite end. I still have hopes.'

On each side of Hutchinson sat Jack and Hilton, his children were also present; Sir Gwillim occupied a central seat. Merrily and pleasantly was the conversation carried on; old times, old events, and old friends formed the topics. References were often made to what Robert had that day shot, and to other incidents of their sport; to these he answered reasonably, but never could be won to show a positive recognition of those around; still called Hilton by the name of Jack; and worst of all never showed surprise

nor a desire for any explanation, or information. Even Sir Gwillim whispered to Hilton, 'It is not as I should wish.'

The dinner was over, and dessert on the table; still no improvement, no word, no sign, to show that his aberration might cease. Mary was pale and despairing; Sir Gwillim serious; the two children gone to bed; Hilton and Jack talking of the world at large. Hutchinson, leaning back in his chair, and seeming to gaze into empty space had long since resigned himself to silence.

Suddenly from the ante-room sounded a yell; a heavy thud struck the door; widely and rudely it flew open, and in sprang a large black-and-tan retriever. Hilton and Jack rose in order to stop the animal, but, with one bound it was alongside of Hutchinson, and amid whinings and short barks, licked his face and hands; at last in grief of being unnoticed, he placed a foot on each of his master's shoulders, threw his head backwards, and gave a long howl. At the dog's entrance, Sir Gwillim had said, 'leave him alone,' and when looked at, the physician signed to them to be silent and not to interfere. Again the dog brought his head down, and looked straight into Hutchinson's eyes;

Hutchinson returned his gaze and gently put his right hand on to the retriever's head. There they remained, man and dog, each gazing one at the other ; the dog whimpering with delight ; the man silent and motionless. The man gave a few pats to the animal, and then he stopped ; again the dog whined, and pressed with his feet, still on his master's shoulders ; the man repeated his caresses, and, at the animal's loud responsive yell of joy, said quite gently,

‘Bob, my fine fellow, where have you been all day?’

Sir Gwillim signed again for continual silence ; he nodded cheerfully towards Mrs Hutchinson, and smiled to himself in a way that admitted but one interpretation—one of pleasure and satisfaction. The wished-for end came at last, accompanied by no sudden effusion, no excitement, no emotion : Hutchinson merely said, ‘Mary, I fear that I have been asleep. Here is Bob, who has been absent all day, and the servant has forgotten to feed him.’

‘Mrs Hutchinson,’ said Sir Gwillim, aloud, ‘you have not yet noticed poor Bob.’

Mrs Hutchinson rose and so did all pre-

sent. As she passed him, Sir Gwillim whispered,

‘Cured—fully himself again.’

Mary passed on, and, while patting Bob with her right hand, placed her left hand on her husband’s cheek, leaned forward, and kissed his forehead.

‘Why, Mary, I really believe you are jealous of Bob.’

Sir Gwillim held out his open hands as if all was over, and said, right joyously,

‘Pray, Mrs Hutchinson, do not leave us. First, we will have a bumper glass all round, and then to the drawing-room and tea.’

All filled their glasses, and although none spoke, all drank to the same toast.

‘Who is that gentleman, Jack?’ said Hutchinson, now for the first time addressing his brother by that name—Jack—his right name.

‘Sir Gwillim Mewse,’ answered Jack, ‘a great friend amongst us all ; and now, Robert, let us to the drawing-room, and old Bob shall go with us.’

Sir Gwillim held up his hand, and said,

‘Excuse me, but I always say a grace—
‘For this, his great kindness, let us all give thanks to God.’

All rose, and followed Mrs Hutchinson and her husband ; and when, as she sat down, she turned towards them, her eyes were full of tears.

‘ Ah ! ’ said Hilton, ‘ sorrow and joy are near akin. I also feel inclined to weep for joy.’

‘ Hilton ! ’ exclaimed Hutchinson. ‘ Yes, Hilton ; what a strange recollection I have of you ! You seem to me like a dream, and yet I know you well, and know you as a friend.’

‘ Yes,’ answered Hilton ; ‘ and to-morrow we will have a long chat. Now we are tired—do not forget the hard day’s shooting.’

‘ You are right ! ’ added Sir Gwillim, putting an emphasis on his words ; ‘ we all need rest.’ And thus ended this eventful day.

CHAPTER XV

DAY succeeded day, and a week passed by, while Hutchinson talked most frequently with Hilton, but it was not until a full week had come and gone that he reverted to the old times. Then, one morning as they strolled round the gardens, he stopped, and turning to Hilton, said,

‘There is a blank somewhere, but I well, too well know, what it means. The more I think of the past, the more thoroughly do I understand how much I owe to you. Docket’s Store, Kathleen O’Byrne, the Mighty Chief, and last but not least, my own failings, all tell the same tale. Hilton, to you, and after

the great God, to you alone, do I owe life, wealth, wife, and children. Some day you shall tell me all, and I also will tell you much.'

'Tell me all you can,' answered Hilton ; 'but I know all, or, if not all, something very near to it, for when I first met your wife and children, I drew her into a confession by repeating to her our adventures by way of a pleasant story to the children.'

'Well, some other time, on some quiet evening when only the family are present we will go over it all. Until then, I shall always feel a strange pleasure in the idea that I have escaped.

'Often (even as I have told you) I have come to myself, a beggar and a miserable outcast—and wished even for death. This time I trusted you, and I awake a rich and prosperous gentleman. My old house still mine, and all I love around me. Hilton, words are weak to say what I feel, and what I owe to God and to you. There are a hundred questions that rise to my brain, but now answer one only, are you merely Hilton, a grenadier sergeant of artillery, or, what are you?'

'Hutchinson,' answered he, 'once was Ball,

and even so, Hilton is merely the name under which I enlisted. My real name is Warren Hilton Knowles. My father was once a rich man ; but, like too many others, he had over mortgaged Knowle Manor : but as I am now rich, I only waited to see you well and happy in order to go and look after our family affairs. This week, therefore, I will leave instructions with you, and go and revisit Knowle Manor ; have a pleasant succession of strolls and walks all over my old home ; see what I have to do towards the paying off the mortgages, then to bring down my father and mother, in order that they may live out the rest of their days in their old much beloved mansion.'

Soon Warren Knowles, (for Knowles again he has now become) was on the acres of his forefathers, and a few days after his last talk with Hutchinson, he had met Mr Beal at the old monolith, heard his account of how his niece was not forthcoming and (as before recounted) had rescued her from being robbed or perhaps murdered ; had left her at the entrance to the mansion of Knowle Manor ; and had wisely or unwisely become the possessor of her glove. As he passed away and the closing of the hall door upon her

fair form left him in utter darkness, he mentally remembered the beauty of Kathleen O'Byrne and her wickedness.

'Ah!' said his thoughts, 'can woman, so beautiful, so frank, be again another child of hell? Yes, she can,' continued his thoughts. 'I admired Kathleen when first I saw her—and what a curse was she on all her surroundings. Miss Beal!—no, she does not look like a Beal; she must have some other name. I certainly admire her, and like all she said and did; I could also love her; but, gently, Master Knowles, a good wife is a rare good thing; and again, an ill-chosen wife is what, until I see good reason, I will not apply to that young lady. Ah! I wonder what her name is. Cannot be "Fried bacon and clear ale!" and these are the only names that come to my hungry soul; so, good-bye to sentiment (and here he took off his hat and bowed towards the mansion), and now for food and lodgings at the old keeper's.'

A twenty minutes' walk brought him to the keeper's lodge; and, according to his expectations and previous arrangements, he here found everything ready for him, even "fried bacon and clear ale." Here

once again he pondered over many things, and matured many a preconceived idea. Long had the keeper been in bed, and still Knowles meditated over the woodfire. He had even got so far lost in the dream-mist as to be leading his bride up the entrance steps of Knowle Manor, was about to enter the open doors, and mid his half-dream was wondering what face was under the wedding veil; he had stopped with a firm determination, that if the face bore not the features that he wished, never should that bride pass into the house of his forefathers, nor become a daughter to his mother. Thus far had he dreamt, when a slight sharp knock came at the window. With a start, Knowles was himself again; that is, he ceased to be Warren Knowles, and mentally became John Smith. He arose and answered the rap, by a corresponding tap from within.

‘Come, daddy, just open, and let me have a word with you.’

Knowles—once Hilton—and now with another alias, John Smith, kept the curtain down across the window so that he from without could not distinguish any form.

Thus standing with the curtain drawn behind him, John Smith opened the window.

‘Is that you, daddy?’ said the voice outside.

‘No,’ answered John Smith, ‘it is not. Who are you?’

‘Where is daddy? tell him, that I am an under-keeper.’

‘And I am also an under-keeper, daddy is upstairs and asleep.’

‘I must see him; tell him I have traced an intruder, and must have orders. I can grab the fellow, as sure as my name is Gaunt.’

‘I will rouse him at once,’ and Knowles having shut the window, took his light and went upstairs. Daddy turned out at once, and after a short conversation they came down. Daddy having made the outside keeper, Gaunt, fully understand that he must obey John Smith, and having also heard all about the intruder, and thus having ascertained that the pheasants and other game were not in danger, he once more sought his bed, while the two younger men started off together. Knowles, alias John Smith, soon heard how some fellow, not in pursuit of game, with intentions unknown, had crept into a cover and stole quietly through it, but

not unseen ; so Gaunt, the under-keeper, had followed him until he had hidden himself in a thicket near the mansion ; then Gaunt had sought the head-keeper and asked for orders. The two young men, Smith and Gaunt, had soon understood one another, and then they silently approached within a certain distance of the intruder's hiding-place. One window alone showed that some one still was awake in the mansion, and even this light, in about half-an-hour, ceased. Then there came to the ears of the two keepers a slight sound, they well knew that it was the snapping of a dry twig beneath a foot, still otherwise all was silent. Knowles tapped Gaunt on the shoulder, a signal previously agreed on if one should think it best to separate. Gaunt touched the other's hand while it still rested on his shoulder, then they parted. Now, Knowles had observed a slight, a very slight, hesitation on the part of Gaunt, and which had come on only within the last ten minutes, therefore he now let Gaunt perceive that he himself went straight to the right, for he doubted his companion's fidelity and truth, and wished to ascertain if this hesitation really existed. Acting under this doubt he sought a long strip of turf which bordered a

gravel walk, and on this he quickly and silently passed in a different direction, and was soon so placed as to be able to watch both the intruder and the keeper. After a long, motionless delay, there was a low twitter. A stranger would have deemed it the note of some night-bird ; but Knowles knew better whence it came. In a short time a like twitter came in reply, and soon he understood that the two men whom he watched were in communication. The keeper went quickly in the direction which he had seen Knowles follow, and was soon out of sight and hearing ; then the intruder sat himself down on a rustic bench, and, having leant back, seemed to listen. After there had elapsed a quarter-of-an-hour, or thereabouts, a far-distant whistle sounded, and the intruder rose, apparently fully convinced that no danger was nigh. Knowles concluded that the whistle came from Gaunt, the under-keeper, and was intended to assure the other of safety. The intruder walked away openly, yet noiselessly, to the mansion, and tapped at a side-door. Some one opened, and a long conversation took place. Thus Knowles, within a short distance of the talkers, became aware of facts and dangers

never intended for his ear—and strange it was that he, under the name of Hilton, formed a principal topic of conversation. His determination was at once made; he resolved to secure the intruder, and to learn from him (either by the pressure of circumstances, or through fear, or even by bribery) something further about the facts which he had just already overheard. The side-door was shut; and even as the intruder turned, in order to depart, Knowles seized him by the neck, and, having twisted his hand into the other's neckcloth, said in a whisper,

‘John Webb, come along quietly: I know you, and have just come in time to take you.’

The man made a resolute struggle, but being much slighter and shorter, and also considerably younger, he immediately felt the futility of resistance; so, speaking as an injured man, he asked,

‘Who are you? What right have you thus to stop me?’

‘I am a keeper, and in looking after Gaunt, I have stumbled on you; but come along, and if there is no harm in you, you shall soon be free to go when and where you like—but first come along.’

Silently and in a short time they reached

the keeper's lodge. Instead of entering the dwelling-house, Knowles passed on to an outhouse, where was a large room, quite distinct from all other buildings, having its windows barred, and the doors strongly made and furnished with heavy bolts. Entering here, he soon found a lamp, which he lighted; then looking steadfastly at his prisoner, said,

‘John Webb, you do not know me, but I know you. Now tell me, how does your mother get on?’

‘My mother!’ exclaimed Webb, ‘my mother!’—and his face changed from sulky determination into blank wonderment. He was a youth barely eighteen years of age; his look of youthful surprise and almost boyish fear made Knowles inclined to laugh. While lowering his voice to a saddened tone:

‘Yes,’ he continued, ‘your mother; for if anything happened to you, she would die of sorrow.’

‘Too true! too true!’ Webb answered, softly, ‘I am a fool to risk it; but what else could I do? The temptation was strong; I thought the reward worth the winning.’

‘The temptation was—nay, is strong. I also have undergone it. I know the whole

affair, and how you seek a man called Hilton—a man whom no one can find.’

‘Who told you that? Do you know the reward?’

‘I do know the reward,’ said Knowles, leaving the first question unanswered and replying only to the second—‘I do. What more do you wish to ask?’

Webb gazed at Knowles, and long hesitated. At last resuming his look of determination, he exclaimed,

‘I do not believe it! it is a lie! you know nothing; you cannot know it. I say that you have lied!’

‘John Webb, you cannot escape from here; but I can let you go. Now, listen to this; in the first place, neither of us wish to kill your mother. She was once nurse up at the mansion—that is her protection.’

‘How know you all this? You say you are a keeper, but I never saw you before; and I will swear before a judge that you are a stranger.’

‘Swear not at all, young fellow; you will find it wiser. But, stranger or no stranger, listen to me. You seek a man called Hilton. Now, I can help you here; but then you

must tell no one, and give me half the promised reward. What say you to this ?'

Webb again looked at Knowles in mute amazement.

'I wish I could find out how you have discovered all this ! But, so far as you have spoken, to that I can agree. But I do not believe that you do know all. No ; I will not agree—it is all a sham, all a feeler, in order to discover something that you do not know. It is a lie throughout !'

'Listen again,' answered Knowles ; 'you do not know Hilton—I do. If you seized Hilton, he could, and no doubt would, smash you. I am his equal. So, will you share the money, and work, you and I together, and in couples ?'

'No ! I will not be cheated into all that. You do not know all—you think you do, but you are out of it.'

'If I know all,' replied Knowles ; 'Will you work and share all with me ? But if you do agree, beware of keeping back anything, and beware of betraying our compact ; we shall both profit by all this.'

'If this ! If that ! Nonsense. Agree. I would agree to anything, if you knew all ;

but you can never convince me that you are in this. It is utterly impossible.'

Knowles smiled slightly ; looked cautiously at the door and windows, as if fearing a listener, then in three strides he came and placed his lips near Webb's ear, and whispered almost inaudibly two words, at the which, Webb turning pale, faintly stammered out, ' I agree.'

' Yes ! I agree, I will agree to everything. Yes ! everything.'

These two words were, ' Kathleen O'Byrne.'

CHAPTER XVI

‘LISTENERS never hear any good of themselves,’ is an old and a true saying. Knowles, under the assumed name and trade of John Smith, an under-keeper, whilst he had listened to young Webb’s conversation at the side-door, had heard much about himself, under his old name of Hilton. It was evident that Webb had gone to report progress to some one within the old manor house, and to Knowles’ surprise had mentioned some of his adventures as Hilton and acquaintances in America. Knowles had thus heard much of importance to himself, and rejoiced in being forewarned and thus forearmed. One thing

required immediate attention, and had been in this way explained by Webb, to wit: that Micky O'Byrne and Kathleen O'Byrne, and others, had, in America, made the solemn oath, before the proper authorities, that one Hilton had murdered one Ball, at, or near to Docket's Store; and had, moreover, robbed the said Ball of rich diamonds and other valuables; and by these means had obtained a writ, so as to have Hilton arrested, and (under the extradition treaty) handed over to America, as a prisoner, accused, and more than half-convicted of robbery and murder. Webb had moreover stated that Kathleen O'Byrne (for she seemed to be the chief mover) had determined to find Hilton before acting on the warrant, as she believed that at the first alarm he would be off, and thus throw difficulties in the way. It was evident that she had been to Hutchinson's home, and from thence had traced Hilton to near Knowle Manor, and had some reason or information to persevere in her search at that place. Forearmed, Knowles had determined, in order to secure Webb, to act even as he had now done. After some silence, he said firmly yet kindly to Webb:

‘Now I shall let you go. Remember it is a bargain that we are to act together ; but if you peach, I well know how to punish you, and also how to cause you to miss all the rewards, which you so much covet. Remember that my name is John Smith, an under-keeper, and although unknown to you, I have nevertheless been long enough here to know all about you and many others, and much of the doings of this neighbourhood.’

Having thus spoken he opened the door, and, standing on one side, he, without uttering another word, let Webb pass out, who went on his way rejoicing, but unfortunately for him the further he went, the less he felt bound to Knowles, alias John Smith. All fear passed from him ; his natural determination returned, and he became ashamed, humbled, and fiercely angry at all that had happened at the keeper’s lodge. He naturally pursued his way to his mother’s cottage-home, some two miles distant, but when he, weary and still angry, arrived there, his uneasy thoughts forbade him to think of sleep ; his conscience told him that he had betrayed a trust, and done what he believed to be directly opposed to his own interests and inclination. Then came the uncomfort-

able remembrance of his bargain, (not spoken but implied) with John Smith. He seated himself inside the old porch, and for a long while allowed disheartening thoughts to afflict, and to make him anxious. The daylight gradually spread across the sky, the sun at last peeped over the distant trees, and roused him from his meditations. He now felt sleepy and inclined for bed, but his anxiety told him that any attempt at rest would be misery.

Again he hesitated for a second; rising up, he then walked rapidly away. He made no stop until he had passed through a neighbouring village, and had reached a superior-looking house situated on the outskirts. It was large and roomy, very neat, and well-kept, and stood some twenty feet back from the high road; and on a brass plate (fastened to the iron palings) was engraved—‘Messrs Lyall, Synkmore, & Wynn, Solicitors.’ Here he halted. After looking at the still closed windows and smokeless chimneys, he unwillingly relinquished his hold of the bell-pull. Still he kept his ground, and for some time leaned against the iron palings. He tried the effect of a whistle through his fingers—no movement nor sign followed. Again for

some time he waited, then he passed through the gate, and sought the back of the house. Here he again tried a long whistle; it was soon answered by the drawing back of a curtain, and a wave of a hand from a window. In due course the back door was opened, and he entered. In the dark passage a hand met his; he was led into a side-room where the curtains still shut out the day, and candles were lighted; then he received one of the rewards which he so much coveted—a smile of welcome from Kathleen O'Byrne. Yes! Kathleen O'Byrne was there, and to inexperienced youth so much beauty and feminine bearing gave assurance of truth and goodness.

‘Have you any good news for me?’ she said.

‘No,’ he answered, ‘but I ’a come to tell you all I did last night.’

She smiled and glanced kindly on him.

‘I duly,’ he continued, ‘at the side-door told to old Lyall the lawyer, all you wished, and he hopes to see you to-day, here at his own house, when he returns this morning, he has heard nothing about Hilton, and more than half-believes that you are mistaken; he finished by telling me to beware of a new

gamekeeper, who, if I met him, might lead me into trouble ; and the old gent. was right, for scarcely had he shut the door, and I had turned in order to go home, when this new keeper, John Smith, was on me ; he held me in his grip, and my struggles were utterly useless ; so he took me to the keeper's lodge, and there tried to cow me into all sorts of confessions.'

'I hope you held your own,' said Kathleen, 'and did not mention anything about Hilton, nor anything else which we wish at present to keep quiet.'

'Well,' replied Webb, 'he knew everything ; all about Hilton and everything else, and before I well knew what I was doing, he had forced on me a bargain to share all rewards with him, to tell him all that happens : he overcame me by finishing his bullying with the mention of your name ; this thoroughly overcame me, and made a fool of me.'

'And then, Webb, what next ?'

'Why, I promised not to betray his secret, and to keep him in news of all that happens.'

'Oh, well done !' exclaimed she, much to the surprise and confusion of Webb.

'Oh, well done !' continued she. 'I did not think that you had so much wit.'

‘How?’ retorted he, lost in wonderment at her approval. ‘I am glad you like it. I was terribly afraid that you would hate me for it.’

‘I love you for it! You have overcome him. You and I are his masters through all this! Oh! well done!’

‘But listen,’ he said, ‘what if he asks me news about Hilton, or about you?’

‘Answer as before; you have done well once. Lie again, and cheat him with his own weapons.’

‘Not quite so easy as you seem to think. I am sorry that he is under-gamekeeper.’

‘Gamekeeper,’ laughed she; ‘Oh, Webb, what a child you are; he is no more a gamekeeper than I am.’

‘Do not call me child! I am a man, and a resolute one.’

‘Oh, I beg your pardon! a man you are, and now you shall prove it. Keep my secret this time; believe me, John Smith is not John Smith; this keeper is no keeper; he is something else—he is a detective! Whatever he may be, one thing is certain, he is no mere keeper. I believe him to be a detective. So you go and see him to-morrow, and tell him that you—no, that I, Kathleen

O'Byrne, have a clue to the whereabouts of Hilton. You watch him, and you will see how vexed he will be. I had better tell you all, for why should any secret exist between you and me. Do we not love one another? Nay, nay, do not make a noise, for old Mrs Lyall is a crabbed old fool. Hush! listen!' continued she, 'these solicitors are most anxious to find one Warren Knowles; he is son to the owner of these estates, and this respectable firm wish to cheat all these Knowles out of all their property; they will be well paid for it. This is how we met: I and old Lyall called on the detective at one and the same moment; it was a rare piece of luck, and I picked up the scent at once and ran the old fox to earth, and dug him out then and there. The detective had committed himself before the mistake was rectified—before he had discovered that I and old Lyall were not there on one and the same business. I thus found out that he was a lawyer, and so I made use of him by promising that I would never divulge his rascality—he called it business—about this Knowles. I am also master of old Lyall.'

'Well, well, well!' exclaimed Webb, 'you

are a perfect wonder, you are!’ So I had better see this John Smith, and just tell him nothing?’

‘Yes, see him, by all means, and come back to tell me all about him and your interview: remember we have a clue about Hilton.’

‘Well, yes,’ answered Webb, ‘but he knows all about us and Hilton; if I lie he will find me out at once.’

‘A sure proof that he is a detective. Now go—here, take these few pounds—money is always pleasant.’

She led him to the door, and he returned to his mother’s dwelling, pleased and proud of himself and his deeds. He went quietly up to bed and was soon asleep—he slept far into the day.

Knowles also slept well into the morning. When he awoke he long lay on his couch, and deeply meditated on all the past. At last he arose, for all his thoughts had culminated in a strong desire to see the old mansion, and to cast his eyes once more on the rooms and pictures of his childhood and early manhood. He yielded to his own wishes; and having duly dressed and breakfasted, he, big stick in hand and to

all appearance a gamekeeper, walked through the paths he so well knew ; making a circuit, so as somewhat to hide his purpose from any one who might watch his proceedings, he gradually drew towards the mansion. During an hour, while in a shrubbery, he paused and even then listened to every sound distant or near, and marked the movements of wild animals and birds ; but neither sound nor sign occurred to make him believe that he was watched. Fully assured that he was unseen, he carefully approached the house, and in a shrubbery not overlooked by any window or opening, he swept the leaves away, until he laid bare a flat stone, in which a hollow had been cut, so as to allow of a firm clutch, of this he took hold, and with somewhat of an effort lifted the stone from its resting-place : he smiled, when the well-known steps met his view. He at once went down, replaced the stone above, and passed on with confidence through the darkness. Familiar with every step and stone he soon came to an ascending flight ; up this he went, and having felt for and found a knob on the wall, he opened a small hole, and through this he looked into a room ; perceiving that it was untenanted, he drew back a panel,

beneath it found a fastening, and having opened he walked into the old drawing-room. Fearing that some one might approach, he advanced only one step, and gazed with strange pleasure on familiar cabinets, and the portraits of his family. A slight rustle fell on his ear, he turned, stepped into the opening, and all marks of his intrusion were gone. Ere he closed the small knob, he once again looked into the room, in order to feel assured that his retreat had been quite unobserved. He looked, and the door of the room was opened, and there entered a lady, whom Knowles recognised to be Miss Beal—she, whom he had rescued and conducted safely back to the mansion. She had scarcely entered, when a gentleman, still young, and decidedly good-looking, followed on her steps.

‘You so suddenly broke off our conversation below, that I was obliged to follow you, in order to know at what o’clock you might wish us to ride to-day?’

‘Let us say two o’clock, and I hope that will suit all the others.’

‘Us,’ continued the gentleman, ‘us! it is a sweet sound.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I mean, that after our conversation down stairs, it is re-assuring to hear you say “Us.”’

‘Mr Greville, once for all, cease this folly, or I must appeal to my uncle.’

‘I will hope for the best,’ answered Greville, and, with a slight bow, he passed from the room. There was in this man’s tone an easy familiarity, a self-reliant confidence, which pleased not Knowles’ feelings. The young lady looked serious, until his footsteps were no longer heard, then she turned to a mirror and said,

‘How serious and cross I do look! I ought not to allow a puppy’s impertinence to disturb me, but I could not help being vexed when he blundered on the fact that I cared for someone else.’ Then she smiled at the mirror. Knowles shut the small opening, and saw and heard no more—but, having gone up a few feet, he sat down on the narrow steps, and through his mind ran the words, ‘but I could not help being vexed when he blundered on the fact that I cared for someone else.’ A self-conceited fellow might have applied these words to himself, but Knowles was not a man to be thus deceived, and well he remembered that Miss Beal had only seen him once, and that was when

the strong light from the hall-door shone suddenly upon him, and only for a few moments, on the night when he had saved her from danger. He recalled the walk homewards—how they had been almost compelled to converse, and how she, of sheer necessity, had been obliged to lean and depend on him. He shrugged his shoulders, and forced himself to re-arrange his ideas. The conclusion he at last came to was simple: 'If she has cared for someone, it might be me—this shall time and opportunity decide.' He again mentally laid his plans, and having thought out how to make an opportunity and how to use it, he fixed on the following Sunday, if possible—but certainly on some Sunday, as the only day in which he could act even as he wished. He arose, hesitated for a second, whether to take one more look into the drawing-room, or to go to another apartment, and then he passed onwards. After a few steps he again found a knob, again pressed in the same way, and once more his eyes roamed over a well-remembered and familiar library. There he beheld Mr Beal himself, who at that very moment left his comfortable arm-chair, walked to the side of

the chamber, and after a short fumble in his pocket, produced a bunch of keys, then he remained silent and still, lost in thought and in serious reasoning. Twice he leant on an iron chest and again withdrew, at last he bent down and touched a spring, when the keyhole became visible; he continued in meditation, and once looked at the bellpull, as if he had a half-wish to summon someone. There he stood a considerable time irresolute. The door was opened, and as he turned towards it, a man entered. Knowles recognised him at once—his scrupulously clean suit of black, his well arranged hair, his total lack of expression, save only the eye, quick to perceive, all showed Mr Lyall, the trusted solicitor to the Knowles family and their estates. Knowles' thoughts reverted to Pickard, the artilleryman, he who had tried to commit suicide at their embarkation, who grew ill and died in Canada, and who had left to him the long-written history of all the wicked deeds and clever deceits of Messrs Lyall, Synkmore, and Wynn—even then came back to his remembrance Pickard's last wish, that his mother should be visited and cared for. Mr Lyall entered, his quick eye scanned Mr Beal's face, just dropped on to

the side of the iron chest, but heeded not the open keyhole, Mr Beal's body hid this.

'Your servant, Mr Beal,'—and fixing his subject in accordance with the other's close proximity to the box, said, 'I came expressly to talk to you about the mortgages.'

Mr Beal returned to his arm-chair, placed his bunch of keys on the table, and said,

'I am glad of it, for you can see by these keys and my position when you came in, close to their resting-place, that my thoughts were with these mortgages.'

'It is a serious subject—very serious. How these Knowles have ever been able to pay the interest, I cannot comprehend! and the last payment is the most extraordinary of all. A week ago, I should have called it an utter impossibility, and now it is paid and your receipt sent up.'

'I was just about,' answered Mr Beal, 'to look at my list of title deeds; these would have pleased me much a week gone by, but now, all your promises that I should foreclose and have possession of Knowle Manor, absolutely my own, all these promises seem to me overthrown. They have paid time after time, the half-year's interest, and each time you have pleasantly said, "It is the

last payment," and still on each and every next day of interest, in comes the money !'

'To me also it is a mystery, but whatever happens, we hold the title deeds.'

After a short silence, Mr Beal abruptly said,

'What, if they pay off the mortgage ?'

'We can throw a thousand difficulties in the way, and each half-year's interest, in spite of their continued payments, must become more and more precarious. We must hold on, and get several more half-years' interest, and delay the repayment of all the monies lent, to an almost indefinite time. A lawyer need never be beaten.'

'But lawyers are sometimes beaten.'

'Not the lawyer, but the lawyer's lack of knowledge.'

'Still he is beaten.'

'But we shall conquer. You know just as well as I do, that in that chest are the copies of all the mortgage-deeds—copies which, by right, should be in the possession of the Knowles family. Without them, they know not how to act—they are positively in the dark, even if they should have ready a million.'

Warren Knowles thus learnt the gross

villany of the respectable solicitors; and even Mr Beal, although he had plainly been led on by the lawyer, seemed about to play a dishonest game. To refuse the payment of a debt, merely because it better suits the lender, is a foul dishonesty.

‘Mr Lyall, I do not quite see my way to all this. Should we be acting legally?’

‘Legal in every way.’

‘How about the morality?’

‘The morality is sound. Every lawyer, every man, who has seen the world and knows the habits of life, considers a borrower to be the legal bondservant to the lender, and should be dealt with accordingly.’

‘Humph,’ continued Mr Beal, ‘I must think over all these points. We are masters of the situation so far, and we must, if possible, continue to be masters; but, in all legality, and (here he paused for a second, and added) in all honesty. Now come down to lunch; we have had enough of all this for one day. Come along.’

Mr Lyall bowed; he well knew the value of silence, the danger of one word too much; he and Mr Beal left the room. Knowles did not for a moment hesitate—he pressed the panel, it opened, and he entered the library;

he took up Mr Beal's bunch of keys from off the table, advanced to the iron chest, tried several keys until the right one allowed the lid to rise—he quickly inspected the outside title of several packets, and put each aside, until he read on the last one—

‘Copies of mortgage deeds, *re* Knowle Manor—Beal and Knowles,’ of these deeds he took possession. Were they not legally and honestly his own? All other documents he quickly returned to the chest, although his eyes did for one second dwell on the ‘Title Deeds of Knowle Manor,’ ere they passed from his sight. He pressed down the lid, it fastened with a spring, he replaced the bunch of keys on the table, looked round the old room and on all its contents; he rejoiced to think that the mortgage would not, could not, be now foreclosed. He went through the panel, it shut behind him. A few minutes afterwards, Knowles was strolling through the woods, as under-keeper to Squire Beal.

CHAPTER XVII

STRANGE is the dovetailing of events. Long since he had almost forgotten the mother of Pickard, the dead artilleryman, whose writings and revelations had first fully opened his mind to the villany of his family lawyer. Now he turned his steps towards her cottage; the ground over which he passed was part of the estate more especially left to his care as a gamekeeper; he therefore did not go directly to the cottage, but wandered sometimes to the left or to the right, silently, and as much under cover as it was possible. A sound of words spoken in a low tone, broke on his ear; he stopped and listened.

‘ Oh, yes, we are quite safe, an hour ago I saw John Smith go up to the big house, so out with the net;’ and then Knowles saw two men place a net across an open gateway, alongside of which one of the men sat down, while the other walked away across the field. A low whistle was heard, and a hare rolled over in the net. The man sprang up, knocked the hare on the head, put it into a sack, rearranged the net, and again waited. Again another hare came and was treated the same way as the first, and thus were seven or eight hares secured. Another low whistle came, which was duly answered; the dead hares and net were quickly put into the sack, swung over the poacher’s shoulder, and the man walked away without any peculiarity which might excite suspicion; he became merely a peasant carrying home some domestic goods. In a few seconds Knowles was at his side; but ere he could be touched, the poacher had dropped the sack between himself and Knowles; and trusting to swiftness of foot, he dashed down a small opening into the wood. Finding that his chance of escape was not so good as he at first expected, he laid his hand against a tree, and swung himself so suddenly round it, that the keeper

ran some feet beyond it, ere he also could turn. This the poacher repeated several times; but Knowles had soon learnt his lesson, and as the poacher tried his dodge for the last time, he very nearly threw himself into the pursuer's arms; and although he was not caught, still he had thus lost all advantage of distance. The poacher still trusting to his activity and youth, struck straight across the open ground, and made for a high hedge, it was a very even race; and, as they neared the fence, Knowles, fearing to be baulked at the leap, drew to the right. They went over together, neck and neck, and so close that even as they landed the poacher struck the other on the back of the head and rolled him over. Then the poacher turned back, scrambled through the hedge, and took back across the same open ground, with a good start of about four or five yards. Up sprang Knowles, dashed at the same gap, and, angered at his fall, put on his utmost speed. Again it was a race, but condition began to tell, even as condition will always tell. Quickly did the pursuer overtake the other, who now saw that his chance was small. Twice did he swerve, and thus avoided capture, but, as he neared the wood,

Knowles said, 'Stop, or I use my stick.' The poacher stopped. The race was won and lost. This poacher, a slim and unarmed man, stood before the other, who carried a heavy bludgeon. Knowles, first of the two, sufficiently recovered so as to be able to talk. 'I saw you catch those hares, so I hold you as my prisoner,' and Knowles, holding the other by the arm, they both walked back to the gate, where the sack still lay.

'You have the hares and net, why not let me go?' and taking out his handkerchief he wiped the perspiration from his face. Knowles twitched the handkerchief out of his hand, and turning up the corner, which had attracted his attention, read thereon: 'J. Pickard.' 'Strange are the ways of life.' He had detected and taken prisoner the only living son of the old widow, to whom he was even now going, in order to relieve and comfort her. To him it was a most unwelcome event.

'Now, look here, Pickard. I am even now on my way to see your mother, and I am very sorry for her, that in an evil hour you have taken to poaching; but come, lift up the sack and let us go the shortest way to her cottage.'

Without a word, Pickard took up the sack, and followed by his captor, walked off towards the cottage. They soon entered the room where the widow sat, an old woman long past the middle-age, but still hale and hearty. Her eyes glared from Knowles to her son.

‘I will not have poached game here. Already it has done us harm. Gaunt has been here and served us a notice to quit; he said it was all because you poached.’

‘Speak to this chap, mother.’

‘What! he is, I suppose, one of those who are making a fool of you—a cat’s paw—and are well paid by your folly. Oh, John! what a fool you are!’

‘He is a keeper, mother, and has caught me at it.’

‘Caught you at it! then you have henceforward a ruined character.’

‘Nay, mother, he seems to know you.’

The old widow looked, and scanned Knowles’ features.

‘Your face is not altogether strange—but, no, I know you not.’

‘Yes,’ answered Knowles, ‘you have seen me before, but I believe you have forgotten.’

I have caught your son in the very act of poaching ; what shall I do with him ?'

She again scanned his face, and after a considerable pause, added,

'Money ; I have some. Will money save him from disgrace ?'

'Mrs Pickard, one thing alone will save him. Let him solemnly promise you, here in my presence, never to poach again.'

'John, will you promise me ? He must, and then he will return to honest work, for we are very poor. The little money that I have is all I put by in order to pay our rent.'

'What is the use of promising ?' said John Pickard ; 'no one will give me a chance.'

'If you promise your mother, I will find you work. I will persuade the head-keeper either to make use of you as a watcher, or find you work elsewhere.'

'Done for you !' exclaimed the young man joyfully ; 'done ! Here, mother ; here it is. I promise, as your own good son, never to poach again—there !'

The widow answered not, but sat quietly down in her arm-chair, opened her Bible, and was lost in deep attention to the words of 'good tidings.'

'Come along,' whispered Knowles, 'I know

more of your mother than you think ; take the sack, and follow me. I will see you safe through it all.'

Thus he left the widow to her wise comfort. He had done more to help and relieve her than the dead son, once of the artillery, ever dreamed possible.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE bells rang merrily. It was Sunday morning. All at Knowle Manor prepared for church. At the keeper's lodge, Warren Knowles this morning put aside his usual clothes, and was soon dressed as, and looked 'every inch,' a gentleman. Over this suit he had a large rough coat ; and, thus arrayed, he hastened, in good time, to a spot whence he could overlook and mark all those who came from the mansion ; but as he had hoped, Miss Beal was not among them ; they all passed on to the church, and then he sped to his paternal home. That morning Miss Beal had, almost immediately after breakfast,

hurried to a walk in the flower garden ; and there unseen she wandered, until the silence of the church bells had told her that all others were gone, and the house left to her alone. She entered by a side-door, which, according to custom during Sunday morning, she bolted ; and strolling leisurely through the hall, cleared the flowers of some dead leaves, inhaled the fragrance of a beautiful rose, and letting her bonnet, still hanging to her neck, drop backward on to her shoulders, went slowly up the stairs. Half-unconsciously she remarked that her uncle's retriever was not on his accustomed mat, but heeded it not. She looked again at some beautiful flowers, which she had lately gathered ; and in order to place them in a vase of water, sought the drawing-room. She entered carelessly, and with that pleasing melancholy, which loneliness oftentimes gives. The door shut with a slight noise, and as if aroused by it, there came the retriever's gentle whine of joyful recognition. She turned towards the dog, and her eyes fell on the form of a gentleman, on whose knees the dog rested his head, while a hand caressed its neck. The gentleman was so engrossed with his reading, that he

had not perceived, nor heard her entrance ; so wishing to be alone, and much surprised at the sight, she turned, and no doubt would have, unnoticed and unseen, left the room, if the dog had not withdrawn his head, and again more noisily expressed his joy ; the gentleman arose, and to Miss Beal's intense astonishment she beheld him who had succoured and brought her home ; him, whom she immediately recognised, but who—to her, was still without a name. He drew himself together, and bowed gracefully, and courteously. 'I trust, Miss Beal, that I have not interfered with your morning's occupation?'

'Oh, no,' answered she, 'but I never expected to have met you here. I thought I was quite alone ;' and, in spite of effort, and a slight feeling of dignity, she could not prevent the blush which rose to her cheeks. Knowles marked it, and with pleasure.

'If you wish to be alone I will immediately leave you. It is Sunday, and on this day many prefer rest and solitude.'

She did not absolutely desire his absence, but at the same time scarcely wished to encourage him to stay, so she wisely reached a vase, and began therein to arrange the

newly-gathered flowers, He approached, and praised their beauty.

‘What lovely flowers! Can I in any way help you? Have you water to fill the vase?’

‘Oh, yes; here is everything; vases and water are always here. Thus began a conversation which from flowers branched off to many other subjects; and, although the words and ideas were not very interesting, the tone was, to Knowles, delightful. Gradually the whole became more confidential, and more tender; there was greater freedom, and a closer interchange of sentiments; in fact, they both passed a most charming morning. He was instructing her, for the second time, how to choose, arrange, and tie a small bouquet which she now held; he was courteously and deferentially asking her to wear it this evening, when voices sounded on the drive outside, and the entrance-bell was rung.

‘Thank you,’ she said, suddenly withdrawing her hands, and leaving him the bouquet; ‘they expect me to meet them.’

She quitted the room, and ran down stairs. He sped to the top of the staircase, and said,

‘Will you not take the flowers?’

She waved her hand, and answered,
'I will come back immediately.'

He returned to the drawing-room, tied the flowers together, placed them on a small table, nigh to which they had been standing; listened for a moment to the voices below, then deliberately passed through the sliding panel, and in the room all was still and untenanted. Mr Beal, who loved society, said to his niece,

'I fear you must have been very dull?'

'Oh, dear me, no!' she gaily answered.
'Your friend whom you left behind has been most amusing, and kindly gave up some interesting book in order to attend on me and the flowers.'

'My friend!' continued Mr Beal, 'whom do you mean?'

'He is a gentleman, but to me his name is unknown. I have just parted from him, and he must still be on the landing.'

'Some friend come unexpectedly,' observed Mr Beal, and walked up the staircase; but although he peered into the drawing-room and several rooms, still he found no one. Like a wise man he dropped the affair for the moment, feeling assured that lunch would assemble every guest. Lunch was served,

and every guest and all the family were there. Mr Beal looked at his niece and smilingly inquired,

‘Did you sleep soundly, Ethel, while we were at church?’

‘No,’ she answered, with surprise, ‘no; but had a most pleasing morning. I told you about your very amusing guest.’

‘You certainly did; but where is he?’

‘Oh, somewhere about the house or grounds.’

‘I think, Ethel, you must have dreamt it; no one but you has seen this ghost—no one let him in or out, there is no luggage, no hat, no coats, or wrappers.’

‘I may have dreamt it, or it may be a ghost, but with your kind permission I should like to just run up to the drawing-room and see.’

‘Do,’ answered the uncle, ‘and be quick. Even if it is the ghost of the gallant Lord Banbury, bring him down to lunch.’

Ethel sprang up the staircase, and quickly entered the drawing-room, it was empty. She paused in a half-wonder; then having turned to the small table, gaily exclaimed; ‘Ha, ha!’ and having raised the bouquet, held it to her, and inhaled its fragrance.

Armed with this proof—to her a proof positive, that he had been with her during a charming morning—she turned to go, when there, intercepting her retreat, stood Warren Knowles.

‘Your promised immediate return has taken some time, but it is a great pleasure to see that you prize the flowers. You see, I have finished and fastened the bouquet.’

‘Yes; but my uncle says, I have slept during church-time, and that you are merely my dream.’

‘Could you not add, your pleasing dream. To me this morning has been one short dream of pleasure.’

‘He also says, that you must at once come lunch, even if you are the ghost of the gallant Lord Banbury himself.’

‘Will you forgive me? I had a wish once again to see her whom once I rescued from violence and robbery, and so being near this place I saw that you did not attend church; my wish to make your acquaintance overcame any scruple, so I entered, and you know the rest. Mr Beal I do not know. Will you kindly tell him that I have made an entry where I had no right, and make my humble apologies.’

‘He shall come to you at once,’ and the young lady again flitted away. Knowles’ voice followed her. ‘Good-bye! Good-bye!’ and she was gone. In haste she ran into the lunch-room and exclaimed, ‘I really believe it is the ghost of the gallant Lord Banbury. So do make haste, or he will have vanished, and in all probability through the hall door.’

Mr Beal and another gentleman went at once to see this gallant ghost, but nowhere was he found. Ethel gave his message and apology to her uncle, who for many a day afterwards often reminded her how well and how long she could sleep, and especially on Sunday mornings.

CHAPTER XIX

SOME three weeks passed away, and, although the unknown intruder himself was not visible, still, during her walks, he not unfrequently saw Ethel Beal. He never met a sauntering lover nor ever noticed a companion save some lady friend, or her small black-and-tan terrier, all which lightened his heart whenever he doubtingly recalled her words which she had spoken when in the drawing-room of the mansion. She had thought herself alone and unheard, and had expressed her vexation that Mr Greville had stumbled on the truth that she had seen some one whom she preferred.

Weary of merely seeing her at a distance, he longed to have the power of conversing, and often meditated on the subject. At length he decided to do what any gentleman but not an under-keeper might undertake—namely, the simple act of meeting, and, of course, apparently by accident. But her own goodness, at a time he least expected, brought them together. One afternoon he found himself nigh to Widow Pickard's cottage. He therefore walked to the porch, knocked at the door, and, after a short delay at her request of 'come in,' he entered.

The widow was seated nigh the window, engaged in knitting, and a chair stood opposite to her, now vacant, as if someone had lately left her alone, after a visit. He sat down; she at once thanked him most heartily for his continued kindness to her son.

'Ah!' she said, 'if you did but know my happiness in seeing him come home tired by honest work, instead of lounging about all day, and then off to poach or worse, about the time he now sups and goes to bed. In truth, keeper, we owe you much more than I can tell.'

'Well, widow,' he answered, 'you can

never guess one great reason why I was so easily persuaded to help him.'

'No,' she continued, 'no, very likely not, but this I do know that, whatever the reason, you still did help us, and in the only way in which real comforting help could come.'

Then she opened her Bible, and began to read.

'I am sorry to ask you to shut your Bible, but I am come here expressly to speak with you about your other son.'

'My other son! I have none other.'

'But you had. He was once clerk to some solicitor, and then he went to Canada.'

'The Lord gave, and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord.'

'Amen,' spake Knowles. 'I alone was with him when he died.'

The widow turned to her Bible again, read for a short time, shut the book, and looked up at her companion.

'You knew him well, then? Did he die the death of the righteous?'

'He did. He spake of Jesus—did his utmost, some time before his end, to right what wrong he had helped to commit, and his last words were for you.'

‘Me? blessed be the Lord! did my dear son give his last thoughts to me?’

‘He did,’ said Knowles; ‘and I promised to see and care for you in his stead.’

‘You!’ exclaimed the widow, ‘you!’ and she rose from her chair and came close to him: ‘Yes, I know your face and voice, both are good and honest, and yet I cannot recall to mind where or when I first saw them.’

‘Never mind me, but help me to fulfil my promise. Your son was very kind to me.’

‘Aye,’ answered the mother, ‘he had a kind heart; but say, you must have been kind to him, and good, or William would never have asked you to look after his old mother.’

‘We were soldiers together in the same regiment, and in the same battery; and so we knew one another well and thoroughly. Now, do be kind to me for the sake of that son, for I shall grieve if I were unable to care for you; and all that depends on yourself.’

‘You have already done more than I and my living son can ever repay. You have saved him body and soul, and me you have changed from misery to almost more happiness than I am entitled to; but the Lord’s will be done.’

‘Then I also rejoice. Now, widow, your lost son wishes you to trust in me, and to ask me for all you require. Will you do this?’

‘Man, what is your name?’

‘My name?’ answered he, ‘here I am called John Smith, but this is not my true name; some other time I will tell you.’

He arose, and bending down towards her, he kissed her forehead; he turned and left the cottage. Knowles walked on to the open green which led away from the widow’s cottage, and there came bounding towards him Mr Beal’s favourite retriever, ‘Rover.’ The dog showed all his usual joy at meeting Knowles—for Knowles, true to his own original feelings, had long since become a friend to all the dogs within his neighbourhood.

‘Why, Rover, my lad, what are you doing down here? You had better come home with me.’

The retriever gambolled along in front of him most cheerfully for some yards and then came to a halt. Although each time that he was called by Knowles he wagged his tail and came forward caressingly, still he immediately turned and trotted back towards the widow’s cottage. Knowles was in all things a keen observer, and more especially where

dogs were concerned; he therefore at once understood that the dog had been either ordered to wait there, or else the dog's companion, whoever it might be, was even now in the widow's house. His curiosity was somewhat raised, and more especially, that if the said companion was in the widow's house, then all his conversation about the widow's dead son, and his own hearty wish to be of service to her, might have, nay, must have, been overheard. He now remembered the vacant chair, which at his entrance he had noticed nigh the window and opposite to the widow. He accordingly stepped to the side of the open green space and sat down on a fallen tree. The retriever came to him for a while, then again retreated to the cottage, laid himself down and waited patiently. The sun was already very low, and the trees cast their lengthened shadows far across the glades, when voices sounded, Rover bounded eagerly forward, the cottage door was opened, and bidding a kind and gentle 'Good-night,' there came forth Ethel Beal. He arose, went forward to meet her and courteously bowed, but at first she did not recognize him; she, therefore having returned his salute, walked on.

‘Miss Beal—I believe I have the pleasure of meeting Miss Beal?’

She stopped and turned towards him.

‘Yes,’ she answered, ‘and I believe that I have the honour of addressing Mr John Smith, the under-keeper?’

If ever Warren Knowles felt awkward, it was at that moment, but quickly recovering himself, he answered,

‘Yes; sometimes John Smith, an under-keeper, but sometimes’—and here his voice ceased, he knew not what to say. He hesitated for a while, and then in his usual straightforward and honest manner, smilingly said,

‘Miss Beal, does your acquaintance with John Smith the under-keeper of necessity forbid you to sometimes condescend to speak to the ghost of the gallant Lord Banbury?’

He again bowed and remained uncovered, expectant of her answer.

‘I,’—she answered, ‘I really do not know what to do; if you are a gentleman, why be an under-keeper? I am quite at a loss what to do or say.’

‘Then be guided by me. I never have deceived.’

‘So said the widow Pickard. I told her

not to trust you until she knew more about you, and she answered that you might be trusted and would be true even to your own hurt.'

'My best thanks to the widow,' said Knowles. 'Be guided by her. She is a good—really good woman, and has seen much sorrow and many a long year of misery and anxiety.'

'Still,' continued Ethel Beal, 'you are an under-keeper.'

'I am; and if you wish it, I now bid you farewell; but, believe me, you do me a wrong.' His voice sank into sorrow, and in his humility he lowered his hat almost to the ground.

What could a woman—a true woman—do? Here was a young handsome man, with all the most polished manners, refined words, and good sense, charitable to the poor widow, who blessed him for his great kindness to her, and also most judiciously brought to bear on her son—here he stood humbling himself before her, waiting for one kind word, and yet with all the bearing and grace of a thorough gentleman. She felt inclined to weep; it was like meeting Belisarius in rags. She felt instinctively that he could be

no mere common acquaintance. She raised her eyes timidly to his face, and almost in a whisper said,

‘I should be sorry to offend you, but I feel that it is not right, not becoming, that I should form an acquaintance with a gamekeeper.’

Then Knowles again bowed still deeper, as a prisoner might receive his sentence, and stepped slightly back.

‘Oh, do stop and hear me,’ she continued. ‘I believe fully in Widow Pickard and her estimate of you, and therefore trust that you will frankly tell me if my decision is right?’

Here he for the third time bowed, somewhat raised his head, and remained in an attitude of deep attention.

‘Believe me, I would not willingly hurt you; you must be satisfied with your own words, and therefore, although I look on John Smith as a gamekeeper, and nothing more, still I can continue to converse with the ghost of the gallant Earl of Banbury.’

‘You have decided most rightly,’ he said, and I thank you from my very heart.’ He raised himself to his usual height; but still remaining with his head uncovered, added, ‘The night is on us; if, therefore, you will

walk towards home, I will follow at a distance; if by any chance you should require me, send back Rover, he will fetch me at once.'

He stepped backwards as if prepared to let her pass on, even as a subject would make way for his Queen, but her heart bade her be merciful, so she held out her hand more warmly than she had at first intended, and could not repress a feeling and consequent tone of pleasure.

'Good-night,' she said. 'Good-night, do not misunderstand me: I shall be so very glad to meet the ghost of the gallant Lord of Banbury. I hope you forgive me any harshness, for, believe me, I have a most grateful memory of what John Smith can do. I did not mean to be unkind.'

And here, strange to say, she blushed at what she had said. He touched her proffered hand, and, with a delicacy where was no familiarity, but deep deference, raised it to his lips, then lowered it gently and kindly; replacing his hat, he drew himself up to his fullest height, and said,

'Milord of Banbury has returned home; John Smith will attend Miss Beal—at a distance.'

She walked on with Rover, who most unwillingly left his male friend behind ; Knowles followed, until he had seen her safely enter the mansion ; then he halted, and, in the lightness of his heart, threw up his hand appealingly and thankfully towards heaven. As he turned his face towards the keeper's cottage, he could not repress the thought of his heart, but exclaimed,

‘ Ethel, thou art good and charming ! ’

CHAPTER XX

WARREN KNOWLES, as a gamekeeper, had gone his rounds, and about ten arrived at the head-keeper's lodge. The keeper touched his hat and said with kindly deference ; ' Mr Knowles, have you not yet had enough of gamekeeping ? '

' No ; thank you. I love it more than ever. But for all that, I must again leave you, and take another short stay in town. '

' Do, sir, do. Now that we have Pickard, we can do tolerably well without you. '

So Knowles was off at once ; walked to the railway station, and long ere many a London club was closed, was at his town-

chambers, fast asleep. Next morning he awoke 'in town,' and among other visits, called on a solicitor, who had long been an acquaintance, and moreover was one of the leading London lawyers. To him had been confided the undoing and paying of all mortgages on Knowle Manor. After the exchange of the usual civilities, the solicitor said,

'We have great difficulties to overcome: Messrs Lyall, Synkmore, and Wynn, although during a long period employed by you and your father, deny all knowledge of any documents connected with these mortgages, and yet in redeeming these mortgages we must conform to all the terms stated in the deeds.'

'It sounds awkward,' answered Knowles; 'but continue in our attempts to pay everything, and above all be very careful to pay the interests as they become due.'

'Of that you may rest assured; but cannot we find some papers connected with these affairs?'

Knowles had by his side a sealed parcel in which were the very documents, now so much needed; this same parcel he gave into the charge of the solicitor, and received his acknowledgment.

‘You will kindly—most carefully—keep this parcel,’ he said, ‘it is marked A : and no doubt I shall some day refer you to it : in meantime, I should feel much obliged if you put it away in your fire-proof safe.’

Knowles well knew he himself now held Knowle Manor secure from all possibility of foreclosure, provided always that the interests in full were punctually paid. He wished to test Mr Beal’s honesty; he already felt great interest in all connected with that gentleman’s niece—he had half-formed plans which he wished to carry out, and justly feared that if Mr Beal’s hope of ultimately becoming the owner of Knowle Manor were destroyed, that gentleman would naturally give up his residence there, and thus Knowles would not only lose his opportunity, but would be deprived of the pleasure of, (perhaps ?) winning the love of Ethel Beal, while he was still unknown, and of course looked on as poor and of no social position. His interview with the solicitor was soon brought to a close. His next visit was to his old friend Hutchinson, by whom, and by all his kith and kin, he was received as the benefactor of them all—as the old and valued friend of the family. With them he passed

the remainder of the day, and learned with pleasure, that Hutchinson had so arranged his own evidence on oath that if Kathleen O'Byrne, or anyone else, pressed for the execution of the writ from America, it would be of no avail, as he had proved that Ball, the supposed victim of robbery and assassination, was not only alive and well, but had appeared before a London magistrate, and was ready, whenever he might be needed, again to come forward. Late that night he quitted Hutchinson, slept at his chambers, and early next day went out of town; and before mid-day was once again on his family acres, strolling as a gamekeeper, and thinking of Ethel Beal. That very day, as Ethel Beal returned from a ride through the large woods, she met a man who had a strong heavy bludgeon in his hand, and was wrapped in a large overcoat. With her, as her sole companion and protector, was Rover, her uncle's favourite retriever. The dog raised the hair of his back, and gave a low, long growl; Ethel Beal felt some alarm, and Rover rushed furiously forward; the man moved not, and the dog went straight at him; but ere the lady could use her voice her four-footed protector, much to her sur-

prise, crouched to the ground, whined joyfully, and lay there wagging his tail. Still the man moved not; he stood like a statue, so quiet and graceful was his attitude. She gazed intently and anxiously, but her trust in the dog's courage and sagacity by degrees overcame nearly all her sense of fear, and therefore touching her horse gently with the whip, she rode forward. Rover's delight immediately became frantic, and the man, removing his hat, bowed low. In that bow there could be no mistake. Ethel Beal had habitually associated with the highest of the land, and with the noblest of many countries. She had been received by them with every sign of courtesy, and all the refined politeness of gentlemanly manners, but never had she known a bow equal to the inexplicable bow of him who now stood before her. By day the memory of that bow had made all who approached her appear awkward and deficient in manners. By night this memory had awakened her with a start, and she had often felt more than half-assured that the ghost of the Earl of Banbury had just bowed to her. The bow which she had first appreciated near to widow Pickard's cottage had simply

haunted her. She approached, and Knowles said in a low yet half-tender tone,

‘May the gamekeeper give you a message from Lord Banbury?’

Now Ethel Beal, although still young had seen the world, had travelled, had heard tender nothings, and had even been addressed by eager words of love, but to her all had been like the wind of the morning, and now the mere bow of an unnamed wanderer pleaded to her heart, while her inmost feelings quivered. She felt a contempt of herself, anger to her own lack of self-command. She nevertheless could not control her voice. She essayed to speak and her lips gave forth a slight and gentle laugh. She could not act as she wished. She had to herself proposed to bow and pass on, but her horse stopped and she held out her hand; he looked up full into her face, and as a blush arose and her lips again vainly tried to articulate, he, even as once before, drew her hand towards him, but not this time merely to press the tips of her fingers with his lips—this time he warmly kissed it; and as she, in sheer despair and utter confusion, shook the reins and thus urged her horse forward, he once again repeated that kiss. Her horse

broke into a canter; she dared not look back; one only thought held her, and that thought was again the ghost of Lord Banbury. Ethel Beal rode up to the door of her uncle's house, and there she met him.

'I heard your approach,' he said, 'and as we had just come in, and Mr Greville had gone up to dress, I came to tell you of his unexpected arrival, and that of course he would dine and breakfast here. So off with you and do not be long—but what a pace you must have ridden! why, your horse is one mass of foam, and here comes poor Rover, dead beat and almost breathless in his attempt to keep up with you! What is the matter?'

'Oh, nothing, uncle; if I had not come quickly I should have been late. Has not the first bell been rung?'

'Well, yes! it has been; but what a state that horse is in. I will go round to the stables, and myself give some orders about this.'

Ethel jumped from the saddle, entered the house and ran upstairs. When some ten minutes afterwards, her confidential maid came, she found her young mistress lost in a day-dream, while tears trickled on her

cheeks. Half-an-hour passed, and the young lady entered the drawing-room, dignified and self-possessed; then Mr Greville came forward and bowed. If he had shaken hands with her, if he had done anything awkward or over-familiar, done anything but bow; but to attempt to bow! her mind at once reverted to the distant wood, to a retriever whinnying at the feet of a man, an inexplicable bow—and did this Mr Greville attempt an imitation? Unfortunately for him his first action had marred the motives of his sudden visit. Dinner was served. Herbert Greville became gay and entertaining; Mr Beal did him full justice, appreciated his anecdotes, and laughed at his comic sayings. Ethel Beal joined gracefully, yet somewhat seriously, in the conversation; her thoughts were far away. To the two gentlemen the dinner had been delightful; one had talked incessantly, while the other had listened. Thus each had enjoyed his separate pleasure. When alone in the drawing-room, Ethel was able to let her thoughts assume their own free direction. Unchecked by the presence of others, the quietness and rest of the room encouraged her to meditation; the scene of that day in the wood recurred to her in full

force. He, indubitably, in manner was perfect, in voice and expressions refined, and in appearance every inch a gentleman. But why in the position of a gamekeeper? Had he degraded himself by some low crime? or was it merely extreme poverty? Then came woman's pity; to think of so noble a looking man obliged to associate with those below him; to think of his misery and his sorrow; to think how lonely in his distant lodge. Tenderness filled her heart, and then fancy weaved a charming romance, all sorts of pleasant adventures and meetings, a gradual development of intimacy; he seemed again to hold her hand, and to draw her towards him; and then he seemed, in her reverie, to bend and kneel before her; 'Miss Beal, I trust I do not awake you?' sounded uncongenially in her ears. She opened her eyes, and was once again amid the sad realities of life. She coldly answered, 'Thank you, Mr Greville, I was merely thinking of the past.'

Her uncle joined in the conversation, which continued in a meagre and uninteresting style. Her uncle at last said,

'Ethel, could you not give us some music? Let it be a song, if I am allowed to choose.'

Ethel Beal hoped thus to be rid of Herbert Greville, and sang long and charmingly ; she ceased, and turning round, was much surprised to see no one present but Herbert Greville himself.

‘Miss Beal,’ he exclaimed ; ‘that is exquisite. Your uncle showed his good taste when he asked you to sing ; your songs are perfect.’

She arose, and looking at a clock, said,

‘I had no idea that it was so late. I am rather tired with my ride ; so I shall wish you, Good-night.’

She turned to go, but he abruptly passed in front of her. ‘Pray, excuse me, but your uncle kindly left us in order to give me an opportunity of addressing you. Yes, of addressing you when alone.’

Ethel Beal remained stationary, raised her intelligent eyes, and looked calmly and coldly at him.

‘Miss Beal, your uncle has fully sanctioned all I am about to say—it is simple. I am rich ; I have a magnificent place ; I have the promise of a Baronetcy ; I am sought by the fashionable world—in one word, I am *the* Mr Greville. I say this to you, because you know the world, and thus can appreciate

all these advantages. Will you marry me? Ah! I have omitted that Sir Charles Stagely has just lost his eldest son, and now there is only a sickly child between me and his fine estates. Why! his and my estates together might claim a Peerage. Will you let me share all this with you?’

‘Ah!’ exclaimed Ethel, ‘that is why my dear Lady Stagely has gone to the seaside.’

‘Miss Beal, does silence give consent? Will you marry me?’

‘Mr Greville, once before you approached this subject; now as then, I answer in the same words, “It is impossible.”’

‘But consider my position, my prospects.’

‘Mr Greville, once and for ever I answer, “It is impossible.”’

‘Miss Beal, think again; you know not how much hangs on your answer.’

‘Mr Greville, I thank you, my answer is given. Permit me to pass. Good-night,’ and bowing coldly yet courteously, Ethel swept out of the room.

Greville remained expectant, but after a time he moved to the fire, sat down comfortably in an arm-chair and mused to himself. His first thought was, ‘What a fool that girl is, what a good offer she has refused, and not

for the first time. Ah ! I did not think her such a fool,' and he mused on. He looked at his watch, and as he walked up to bed the thought came to him, 'I wonder if I could injure her, or her uncle ? He is still in trade, and I am also connected with something of the same sort. Hang me if I do not go to town and try.'—So ended Herbert Greville's declaration of love ; and instead of seeking his couch, full of tender emotions, he sank into sleep with his heart replete with hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness ; and when his own snore awoke him, he turned round and muttered, 'Old Beal and his niece are two fools,' and so the discarded lover slept again.

Next morning Herbert Greville was out of bed betimes ; he breakfasted early, and before Mr Beal arose was in the train and hurrying up towards London. A short note contained his excuses ; he pleaded business, and business of importance. Ethel was also awake earlier than usual. She wrote a note to her uncle, and asked permission to visit Lady Stagely, who had lost her eldest son, and was now staying near the sea at Dunscombe. She and her uncle breakfasted together, and in the afternoon of the same

day she arrived safely at Dunscombe, and was welcomed heartily and tenderly by her cousin, Lady Stagely. After her departure from Knowle Manor, the usual pleasures and occupations of a country-house went on; and Mr Beal and his guests scarcely heeded the absence of his niece. One alone wearied himself in his hopes of meeting her, and some days elapsed ere he became aware that she had gone on a visit to her cousin, and to the sea-bathing place called Dunscombe. He felt unwilling to follow, and lived on in daily expectation of her return. He, therefore, was one who formed part of all the arrangements for beating covers and killing game. Week followed week, and still he lingered at the Manor; but at last his longing to see Ethel, and be with her, overcame him; and when the last of a long series of merry-makings was over, he spoke to the head-keeper and was off. He duly arrived at Dunscombe, and having secured rooms at a small hotel called 'The Ship,' he hoped soon to refresh his heart by a sight of her whom he loved. Unfortunately for him and his wishes, Lady Stagely and her cousin lived a retired life, for which their deep mourning-dresses showed a sufficient reason. He soon

knew their carriage, the liveries, and their usual movements. He watched and when he had seen her whom he sought, he retired to his hotel with good spirits and a light heart. The weather was fine and oft-times Ethel accompanied the nurse and baby (now Lady Stagely's only child) in their walks on the far spreading sands. Knowles soon became aware of this fact, and, seated on the low cliff, oft watched her for hours. He always hoped that she would some day separate from the nurse, and then he again could have approached her. He determined that he, leaving the tenor of their conversation to circumstances and chance, would teach her to love him, and in this attempt would use every charm and wile justified by honour. One day when the sands had been left bare to a greater extent than usual, he sought his accustomed seat on the cliff; but to his great disappointment, the nurse and baby appeared unaccompanied by Ethel Beal. As Lady Stagely's beautiful white spaniel was with them, he rightly surmised that the ladies were gone for a drive. He had long ere this, and of set purpose, become a gossip with the turnpike man, and from his information generally found out on

which road was the carriage. A short walk and a desultory conversation at the gate soon told him all he needed. He strolled gently along, and even as he had expected, he, within a couple of hours, met the returning carriage, and was rewarded even as he wished. He watched the carriage as it passed through Dunscombe; but instead of being driven home, it was turned down towards the sands; Knowles immediately and at a quick pace followed. When he arrived at the shore, the two ladies had alighted and were seated on the beach. Small accidents bring greater incidents. The nurse, as was her custom, had walked across the sands, and rested on a rock, which at high tide sometimes was a small island, and at other times entirely submerged several feet below the surface of the water. She kept the baby there in the balmy air, until the rise of the tide made her aware that it was time to wend homewards. Just then the beautiful white spaniel, either frightened by the rolling waves, (there was a breeze) or from perhaps catching a sight of his mistress on the distant shore, broke from the nurse, and ran at his best pace across the sands. The nurse well knew how angry her mistress

would be, if she returned home without the dog. Having therefore left the baby, which was wrapped in a thick shawl, on the dry rock, she hurried in pursuit. Unluckily some boys, nearer to the beach, seeing the dog at full speed, shouted and joined in the chase. The spaniel ran hither and thither, and considerable time passed by ere he was secured. Then the nurse turned towards the rock where the baby was, but she stopped horror-struck ; it was too late. The tide had flowed over the flat sands ; a hundred yards of sea intervened, and waves, impelled by the tide and wind, rolled towards the shore. In despair she rushed to and up the beach. She ran to an old fisherman, who was mending his net, and with eager haste made known her misfortune. He gazed leisurely to windward, and then along the coast ; he slowly shook his head, and said, ' I do not know ; there is no boat at hand, and even if there were, it would be slow work to put off with this wind and tide ; and you can yourself see, that all the men are some distance yonder down beach.'

Time passed, and every moment increased the danger. The nurse suddenly saw Lady Stagely ; and immediately ran frantically to-

wards her mistress screaming, 'The baby! the baby! oh! he is alone on the rocks!'

Lady Stagely and Miss Beal started to their feet, and the latter again urged the old fisherman to make an effort, and by sign or voice to summon the distant seamen, in order to rescue the child. Lady Stagely sobbed out, 'Oh! my child! my child!' and gazed with horror at the rising tide.

'The rock is still uncovered!' almost shrieked Ethel; 'is there no one to help us!'

'Yes, there is!' said a well-known voice close at her; 'what can I do?'

'Oh! save the baby! it has been left on that rock!'

'On that rock out at sea?' asked Warren Knowles.

'Yes, there!' and she pointed to the small rock. 'It will soon be covered, help us for the love of God.'

'Say no more,' exclaimed Knowles; 'I will do or die.'

Having quickly disencumbered himself of his shoes and coat, he ran down the sloping beach; stood, one moment, looking at the moving waters, then seizing the right opportunity, he sprang head-long under the first

wave, dived out far and clear of all the breakers, and was on his way to the rock.

‘He will scarcely do it,’ said the old fisherman; ‘here come the other men, although they would never have been in time to save the child, we may perhaps be able to help that fellow through—he is a rare plucky one.’

So, under the direction of the old man, the fishermen suddenly sprang into life. They hastened over the crest of the beach to where a large boat lay; their cheery voices as they lifted and drove the boat along reached Knowles; he knew the sound and better hope came to him. The boat was heavy, and it had been kept secure some distance from the sea; and thus he had gained the rock ere they began to launch it. Even, as he made his footing good, a wave rolled slightly over the rock; he at once saw the baby, still wrapped in the warm shawl, so carefully arranged by the now almost despairing nurse; this covering he gently opened, in order to see if the little thing were safe. The child slept in a quiet sleep, as if its innocence trusted all to God. Knowles again covered it up, wrapped the thick shawl still more securely and tightly round, and lifted the Lady Stagely’s only child into his arms;

then with a glorious shout, which the wind hurried to the shore, he, using both hands, raised the baby high above his head. Lady Stagely, standing beside her cousin, dropped her face on to her open hands, and sobbed thanks; Ethel removed from her shoulders a large scarf, and waved it in the air; while the fishermen stopped 'one moment in their labour, and, with waving hats, gave a hearty cheer.

'Now, my lads,' said the old fisherman, 'with a will! hey! hey!' and ere another five minutes had passed, the large boat was on her way. Although eight sturdy English fishermen tugged at the oars, her advance was slow; they rowed against wind and tide; still they made way. Meanwhile time had fled, and but for Knowles' coming the baby would long ere this have ceased to be. The waves now washed over the rock; gradually, wave by wave, he felt their increased height, and soon they passed to above his waist; he knew that the delicate child must of necessity be kept warm and dry, and all his care was given in order to keep it in that condition. The tide rose rapidly; soon his only means of keeping his living charge free from all danger and injury was, while

each wave dashed over his shoulders, to lift the boy aloft above his head. The boat laboured slowly along ; still higher and stronger came the waves, and higher still did he raise the child. The pressure of the water, the strength of each sea, made him feel the insecurity of his footing ; he felt that he, together with the baby, could reach the shore, but would the delicate sickly child survive the wet and cold ? His manly heart, his pity for the little helpless being, his firm determination, infused unwonted strength into his vigorous frame ; he held on when another would have failed. Those on shore scarcely knew what happened ; they saw the small object held aloft, but none, save the mother and her cousin, fully appreciated the kindness and the wisdom of the act. The boat drew nigh ; a heavy wave rolled in, and passed even above Knowles' head, it rushed on, lifting the boat ; then, even as it passed, the old fisherman shouted, 'Now for it, my lads ; now or never.' The eight strong men stretched to their oars, the craft sprang forward ; as it floated across the submerged rock a seaman seized the baby, and several horny hands laid hold of Knowles ; the child

was passed astern to the old man, who steered, and Knowles was safe on board.

‘Steady, my lads,’ said the steersman, ‘we have done it now.’

The size of the craft enabled them to bring her round safely, in spite of the ever increasing waves. Tide, wind, and sea, all helped them on their return; the boat neared the shore, a short check to her forward movement, until a smaller wave and an even sea showed the opportunity; two good strokes, and the craft touched the beach, a dozen strong fellows laid hold of her and ran her up high and dry. Knowles jumped ashore, and holding in his arms the innocent cause of all this adventure, hurried on. He came to Lady Stagely, who, with a silent burst of tears, received her child, which was lost and won; she bent forward and opening the damp shawl, kissed her still living and only child, passed her hand down inside the covering, and ascertained that it was still warm and perfectly dry.

Regardless of Knowles, of her cousin, Ethel, and of all else—her heart being for the moment still wrapped in her child, she hastened to her carriage, got in, Miss Beal followed. The horses sprang forward

and Knowles stood shivering on the beach.

Knowles was left standing on the beach, but not alone. No! Some twenty brawny fellows swarmed around him. At first they all shook hands with him, then the old steersman gave him a small horn of right good rum. Three cheers followed. One gigantic fellow said, 'I think, sir, you live at the Ship Hotel.' Knowles answered, 'Yes, I do;' and ere he could resist, or even guess what was about to happen, he was aloft on shoulders that seemed made of oak; with cheer after cheer, amid good-natured jokes, he soon found himself in front of the Ship Hotel. The fishermen lifted him from their shoulders, as if he himself were a baby—so tenderly, so kindly. He loudly said, 'Thank ye, all; thank ye. I am now wet and tired; I will see you all to-morrow.' He turned, and went in; and as he passed from their sight, they again gave three such cheers, and one more, that all Dunscombe wondered what had happened. The local policemen ran in haste to the spot, when the old steersman said,

'It is all right; we only cheered a fellow who had done his duty, for he saved a child

from drowning. God bless him for his kindness !'

Knowles, with the help of dry clothes, a warm fire, and a good dinner, was soon all himself again. He even strolled through the town, and gazed cheerily at the lighted windows of Lady Stagely's house; and as a shadow for a moment obscured their brightness, he hoped and even fondly believed it to be the shade of Ethel. Inspired by the sight, he stopped and rang the door-bell, and on inquiring was rejoiced to hear that the baby and the two ladies were none the worse. He walked back to the hotel a most happy man. Ere he lay down he knelt in prayer; then seeking the repose he much needed, he slept the peaceful sleep of the righteous.

CHAPTER XXI

TO-MORROW came ; Knowles arose, and even as a strong and healthy man should be, he felt the better for all his exertions and the adventure of yesterday. After his breakfast he strolled down to the lower town, and soon discovered the cottage of the old steersman, the leader of the fishermen on the previous evening. He was most heartily welcomed. On Knowles expressing a wish to see all the eight who had rowed in the boat which rescued him and the baby, the old man said, 'There are two of them, my sons, there on the beach mending the nets.' He and the old man went to them, who thanked him for

his appreciation of their help ; then he called on all the others in turn, and found them all to be the same manly, straightforward fellows. As for a reward, or even a hint about a money obligation, Knowles quickly saw that such an offer would be an insult. So, rejoicing at such a glimpse of the noble side of mankind, he returned quietly to the Ship Hotel. On his way he met a man-servant, who inquired if he were the gentleman who had yesterday afternoon rescued Lady Stagely's little child ? On Knowles answering in the affirmative, he was presented with a note, in which Lady Stagely after regretting her ignorance of his name, hoped he would give them the pleasure of his company at dinner, on that very day, and informed him, that Sir Charles Stagely would by that time have returned home and would, she felt sure, earnestly seize the opportunity of thanking the rescuer of his only child. Lady Stagely added that a verbal answer would suffice. Knowles gave the answer that he would have great pleasure in accepting, and having ascertained the dinner-hour, he went down to the sands and visited the rock, on which the baby had been left by its nurse, and where it had so nearly finished its life of innocence. Here he sat for a long

time, recalling the past, or meditating on the future; ere the tide could detain him, he arose, went back to his rooms, dressed in evening costume, and gently strolled to the Stagely's house. When he entered the drawing-room Ethel was there alone. He bowed, and she gracefully and kindly held out her hand.

'The ghost of Lord Banbury trusts that Miss Beal has not suffered from the excitements of yesterday?'

'Oh, no; but how can we all ever sufficiently thank you for what you have done for us.'

'I did my duty, and I obtain my reward in your thanks.'

'Or rather in those of Lady Stagely,' added Ethel. 'She will be here directly, and is most anxious to thank you, and to know your name.'

'John Smith,' answered Knowles, 'John Smith at her command.'

'Nonsense,' said Ethel, 'better be a ghost, a hobgoblin, or even assume the title of Earl of Banbury—be anything but John Smith.'

'I trust that you have not forgotten, Miss Beal, our last meeting in the birchwood at Knowle?'

Ethel once again slightly blushed, and

hesitated ; there came across Knowles that strange instinct of a lover, he stepped towards her, but even as he was about to take her hand, the door opened, and in came Lady Stagely.

The advantage of dress is great, nay, it is sometimes wonderful. Knowles was at all times a fine and good-looking man, but in his evening clothes there was in him a refinement, a superiority. As he bowed to Lady Stagely, both ladies were struck with his appearance.

‘Have I the great pleasure of speaking to him who rescued my child?’

‘I was the humble instrument,’ answered Knowles.

Lady Stagely held out her hand and welcomed him heartily and warmly ; ‘And by what name am I to know our benefactor?’

‘John Smith.’ answered Knowles, ‘always at your command.’

Ethel had been delighted when she saw him step forward to meet and bow to Lady Stagely ; and still more delighted was she when she perceived what a pleasing effect he made on her cousin. She scarcely knew why, but she felt proud of him. Pride, nevertheless, comes before a fall ; and all her pride

in him gave place to an ill-feeling of degradation at the words 'John Smith.' She arose from the sofa, and with agitation exclaimed,

'He is not John Smith. I have met him before, and I am sure that John Smith is an assumed name. Do, cousin, refuse to speak to him, until he owns his right one.'

'I owe him too much,' said Lady Stagely. 'Under any name, I am his friend for ever.'

'But he is not John Smith, and I declare that he is bound to give his right name.'

'Miss Beal must forgive me this question. Has she ever heard any other name applied to me?'

'No! No name. I have heard of a ghost, but no name.'

'Cousin,' said Lady Stagely. 'You must be satisfied with plain John Smith. Still, if that is not the true name, I should like to hear the other.'

'Pardon, fair ladies; no other name can be given me to-night.'

'I am,' said Lady Stagely, 'quite content.'

While Ethel sat down somewhat apart, still dissatisfied at the name of John Smith, and yet pleased with all the incidents just past, it was to her such a relief to see her

admirer, perhaps her lover, and certainly one who always sought her society, taking his place in what she believed to be his proper sphere. During a considerable time he and the two ladies spoke on many subjects, but the baby and the adventures of yesterday constantly recurred. At last the door-bell sounded, and Lady Stagely exclaimed,

‘That is Sir Charles. Am I to tell him that Mr John Smith, the rescuer of his only son, is here?’

‘Certainly, if you please,’ answered Knowles, with all due humility.

‘Oh! what a shameful name,’ exclaimed Ethel.

‘Miss Beal,’ answered Knowles. ‘What is there in a name? If John Smith saved the child, then John Smith is, in the mother’s eyes, as great a hero as if called by another name.’

‘But it is so common; so unmeaning.’

‘Man is known and judged by his deeds; his name is simply of no consequence.’

‘Then you remain most obstinate. How strange. Yesterday afternoon I asked for help and you eagerly acquiesced, and at the risk of your life you saved the child. This

evening I ask you merely to drop your assumed name, and you refuse.

‘Miss Beal, I would do much for you, but really a name is such a trifle; it is scarcely worth a question.’

‘Then I shall treat you as an under-keeper until your name is changed,’ so said Miss Beal; but could not restrain a sweet smile, as he, in appearance a perfect gentleman, and in deed a hero, saddened at her words. A servant threw wide the door and Lady Stagely, as she again entered, said,

‘Mr Smith, here is Sir Charles, who, I am happy to say, has come down all the way from town in order to be in time to thank you on this very day.’

Her husband then came forward; he hastened to Knowles, and held out both his hands; ‘Mr Smith, it is with the greatest pleasure that I make your’ and here he stopped short, gazed at Knowles for a second, and then exclaimed, ‘Why, Warren, in the name of misfortune, how did you become John Smith?’

‘*Tu quoque*, Charlie! how, in the name of all good luck, did you become Sir Charles Stagely?’

The two friends shook hands and laughed, and then they shook hands again.

‘Charlie, that is a real pleasure!’

‘Pleasure!’ said the other; ‘it is a paradise! bar wife and child; and you know, that I have greater friendship for you than for any other person on earth! Give us another shake of your hand, you dear old fellow! in saving my child, you have also saved my wife and me!’

Their joy was unbounded; so was the astonishment of the two ladies. Just then the butler announced dinner; when Knowles putting his hand on Sir Charles’ shoulder, whispered, ‘No other name of me! call me Warren and only Warren; keep secret all other names.’

‘Warren, said Sir Charles, aloud; ‘offer your arm to Lady Stagely, Ethel falls to my lot.’

While on the way to the dining-room, Ethel hastily said,

‘Is his name really Warren? or has he any other name?’

‘He,’ Sir Charles answered, ‘is an old brother officer of mine; his name is Warren; and a good old name it is! but I should love him, whether his name were Smith, or

Crononhatonthologas. He has had very great misfortunes. He and his father have lost all they had ; and some years now past, he was obliged to sell out of the Guards, through absolute poverty. We talked of a good subscription for him ; but he was gone, and no one knew or could possibly find out his whereabouts. I have since then, neither seen, nor heard of him. He is a most perfect fellow ; everything that is good and manly. I love him with all my heart.'

He ceased, and then for the first time Ethel also said, not aloud, but in the silence of thought,

'I also love him with all my heart ! But,' continued she aloud, 'is he so very poor as to be obliged to do something in order to live?'

'I really do not know how that may be ; but even if he became a ratcatcher by profession, he still would remain the same noble, honourable, and first-rate fellow he always has been, and will, I feel sure, be to the very end.'

Ethel tingled with delight. The under-gamekeeper, to whose mere conversation she with pleasure had listened, at which she yet felt degraded—he was declared by Sir Charles

to be not only a gentleman, but apparently his goodness and superiority were vouched for by a whole regiment of the Guards ; and thus John Smith was promoted to Mr Warren.

Time passed on. Knowles, during many days, enjoyed the smiles of Ethel ; and with these two Sir Charles and Lady Stagely drove and wandered all over the neighbouring beautiful country. Still Knowles, although he appreciated the softness of tone and manner with which Ethel met him, nevertheless he feared a refusal, he feared to be too precipitate ; was he not still an under-keeper in her uncle's employ, and this fact had always been, in her eyes, a seeming disgrace.

One day, while he accidentally stood in the railway station and watched the arrival of a train, he saw Mr Beal of Knowle Manor descend, and soon afterwards drive off in the direction of Lady Stagely's home. He first took the precaution of going to the house, and of asking if Mr Beal had actually arrived ; he was answered in the affirmative ; then he returned to the Ship Hotel, wrote a courteous regret that business needed his presence, and while thanking Lady Stagely for all her kindness, begged her to say for him ' Good-

bye' to Miss Beal and 'Charlie,' and expressed a hope ere long to return and see them all, dear baby included. Having packed, he went, and once again arrived safely at Knowle Manor, and again fell into his place as John Smith, under-gamekeeper.

END OF VOL. I





